Women & Revolution

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Liberal Betrayal

Marxist Answers

Also inside: Rise of Reaction, China, India, Mexico, Healthcare & more

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Editorial
The Rise of Reaction and the Fight for Women's Liberation

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Every day we are witness to the unraveling of the liberal status quo of the last 30 years. As the Soviet Union breathed its last and the liberal democratic capitalist model of the West emerged as the victor from the Cold War, liberal ideologues prophesied about the "end of history." According to this view, this new era would be one of gradual, lasting progress through the international expansion of the free market. This was a form of liberalism suited to the conditions of the post-Soviet period.

Looking at the state of the world today, this notion of continued gradual progress under capitalism rings utterly hollow. Nowhere is this clearer than when we consider the state of various oppressed groups—women, LGBTQ+ people, and racial, religious and national minorities. The election of Trump has accelerated the dynamics fueling the growth of right-wing reaction internationally, bringing the rights of such groups under increasing attack and rolling back whatever gains were made in the preceding period.

The Pussyhat marches came and went and #MeToo happened, but Roe was axed and Trump is back in the White House. Yet the women's movement is nowhere to be seen. What we have instead is more and more young men turning to misogynists like Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson. Indeed, #YourBodyMyChoice was the trending hashtag after Trump's election. Trans people and kids are under attack across the board internationally, yet the LGBTQ+ movement continues cannibalizing itself, weakening itself ever more in the face of growing reaction. And in more and more countries in the West, it's open season against racial minorities—witness the surge in popularity of Le Pen in France, Meloni in Italy, Farage in Britain, or the AfD in Germany. In these very countries, the working class faces deteriorating conditions, but instead of unity, different sectors of the oppressed are pitted against one another. Whether it's women, sexual, racial or religious minorities, there is no clear road forward. ***Why?***

The same question is posed, albeit with some differences, in countries under the imperialist boot. Gaza has been razed to the ground. In 2022, Iran saw enormous protests against the regime when Jina Amini died in police custody. In India last year, we saw yet another horrific rape and murder that led to mass protests across the country. In Mexico tens of thousands of women took to the streets in 2022 to protest femicide, and similar events took place in Türkiye in 2024. In Poland, the movement for abortion rights was

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Women in China

Slaves of the Family or Fighters for Revolution?

By Ñico Connelly and Qimin

Chinese communist soldiers, 1949. (credit: AFP)

What does the future hold for Chinese women? As U.S. imperialism ramps up its pressure on the Chinese deformed workers state, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has doubled down on strengthening the family—and all the reactionary social controls this entails for women. Just look at the introduction of the so-called divorce "cooling off" law, mandating a 30-day waiting period before the separation process can start. The bureaucracy is exhorting women to have three children, and yet the marketization of the economy has destroyed social services which free up women's time. As a result, women cannot afford to have more children while they already balance working and caretaking. Worse is out in the countryside, where there have been massive scandals of "chained women," abducted domestic slaves bought as brides since the introduction of Reform and Opening Up.

In reinforcing the family and continuing its alliance with the capitalist class, the CPC deepens the internal contradictions of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and undermines the capacity of China to defend itself against a belligerent United States. There are two paths for women in the coming period: they will either return to domestic slavery under the diktats of the CPC or they can emerge as revolutionary fighters at the head of an internationalist working-class movement to combat U.S. imperialism.

How Did We Get Here?

The condition of women in China has always reflected the level of social development throughout the country. The

Retamal/AFP

AFP

CPC updates its propaganda statue in Wuhan. Can you spot the difference?

AP

Hutchins/VCG

Left: Mother laboring in fields with child, 1942. Right: Women working in Anshan iron and steel factory, 1956. Masses of women were mobilized to join the working class after the 1949 Revolution.

destruction of the semicolonial economy by the Chinese Revolution created the foundation for real improvements in the condition of women just as it opened the way for national development. For the first time, women could receive a share of land equal to that of men and were free to initiate divorce. Despite China's material poverty, serious attempts were made to socialize domestic labor with collective kitchens and housework—allowing upwards of 70 percent of women to participate in the labor force by the late '70s. Communist women were among the radical vanguard of land reform. Yet Maoist China's enormous bureaucratic distortions, which made it impossible to raise productivity with anything but force, eventually brought the materially poor and isolated economy to a paralyzing halt—creating a crisis which eventually saw Deng Xiaoping's right-wing market reforms come to the fore.

There have been immense contradictions in this development. After more than three decades of China's integration into the world economy, women have become integrated at the heart of the socialized production process. At the same time, exploitation and the bondage of the family degrade the new freedoms of working women. Chinese women have experienced real advances in their social status relative to other women in the Third World and are often politically conscious of this. Centrally, this is because the capitalist class does not have state power, and the commanding heights of the economy remain collectivized, which has allowed the regime to redirect massive foreign investment into productive internal development. While millions of Chinese workers have been lifted out of poverty, the CPC's total accommodation of international capitalism has come at an immense cost. The dismantling of collective care systems, rural childcare, healthcare, and care for the elderly have been a social catastrophe. This has come with the return of all the "old muck," as Marx put it. Take the return and skyrocketing of the bride price or the social preference for boys to inherit property within the family, which has produced a gigantic gender imbalance of 35 million more men. As a result, ancient social relations have been amalgamated with the heights of modern industry.

China's social progress has exacerbated the contradictions at the core of the CPC's growth model: economic development has hinged on integration into the U.S.-dominated world order and growing capitalism internally. The poverty in the countryside has hindered national development, but China's access to the globalized economy has allowed it to partially overcome this poverty by producing for export. Today, the most powerful threat to China comes from the U.S., which is tearing up the international economy and hiking up national barriers such as tariffs to shut China out of global markets. The CPC's national-bureaucratic interests mean that its response to Trump exacerbates national divisions between U.S. and Chinese working classes rather than seeking to mobilize U.S. workers against the American Empire.

Facing growing external pressure, Xi Jinping and the bureaucracy demand women follow a "new culture of mar-

Shen/Bloomberg

Tencent headquarters, Shenzhen. CPC promotes growth of capitalist class.

Linwei/Alamy

Shanghai, 2009: Woman carries child on back while working snack stall. CPC demands she have two more!

riage and childbearing." Rather than further alienate or even expropriate the capitalists, the CPC has sought to shore up their old model of providing mass labor to fuel cheap manufacturing by promoting mass pregnancy. This is what is behind the "Three Child Policy," which accompanies an ideological push for traditional values of filial piety. Ultimately, the CPC's approach will mean tearing women out of the workforce, taking along with them a large potential source of political, economic, and even military power. Unable to maintain its collaboration with the U.S. and constrained by its national-bureaucratic interests, a flailing CPC is attempting to maintain social stability at the expense of women and the working class rather than at the expense of U.S. imperialism. Rather than expropriating the capitalists and providing quality healthcare, schools and full employment, the CPC leaves rural children incapacitated by tapeworm infections and students to waste their youth preparing for the *gaokao* (extremely competitive college entrance exam), while college graduates from elite schools still can't get jobs. Yet young people are supposed to have more kids. Dividing the population into separate households undermines the productivity of the economy, as millions of individual households daily expend resources on the constant menial chores of cooking, cleaning and childcare. In short, the CPC is propping itself up using the very social relics which the revolution laid the basis to destroy.

In the coming period, it will be essential for revolutionaries to link the struggle for women's emancipation to the defense of China, not least because the CPC's reactionary answer to the breakup of the liberal order expresses itself most clearly on the terrain of the woman question. Whereas in the home all sorts of reactionary ideologies fester—a reflection of the degradation of women and their isolation from society—freeing up women for political and economic work would make China a powerful beacon for women in Asia and around the world. While the family is used to plug the holes of decaying social services destroyed by marketization, whose devastating effects were on full display with "Zero Covid," easing the burden on the home through quality childcare and pensions could serve as a rallying point for working men and women. However, every step toward socializing the functions of the family and freeing women from the home requires breaking the domination of the international economy by U.S. imperialism.

The State of the Feminist Movement

The feminist movement demonstrates the problem of fighting for women's rights absent an anti-imperialist perspective. The bureaucracy has fueled a feminist movement which is hostile to the workers state and has become the darling of Western media bent on using activists justifiably outraged at the condition of women as a battering ram against the regime. Now that the CPC is herding women back into the home, the feminist movement has been subjected to severe and escalating repression, a turn away from its former regulated legitimacy in Chinese society. It is essential that revolutionaries ***defend feminist protesters against state repression!*** The brutal repression feminists face will only drive them further into the arms of the imperialists.

But the inability of the feminist movement to really change the situation of women is due to its liberal perspective and strategy. The problems of the feminist approach are encapsulated in the cultural flash point of feminist comedian Yang Li. Her jokes about men's incompetence have ignited controversy. In response, many men have opted to defend the status quo and the bureaucracy by arguing that bourgeois gender politics from the West will destroy China and the unity of the working class. Such a reaction reflects the fact that the feminist strategy cannot, nor does it intend to, unite Chinese working people against social inequality. Rather, it ignites Chinese nationalism, which posits that the strength of the nation to resist foreign incursion starts with a defense of the family. It would make the women's movement all the stronger to link the fight to free women to the defense of China by demonstrating how the CPC's reactionary policies for women undermine the conditions of the working masses as a whole.

Feminists are rightly enraged that the CPC is placing heavy pressure on women to bear three children, and many have turned to such separatist methods as birth and marriage strikes. While "lying flat" and individually rejecting familial obligations may be possible for urban petty-bourgeois women, this is not the case for working-class and peasant women, who rely on their families to pool together the resources to survive. Fighting against the bureaucracy's reactionary policies by solely focusing on women's right to refuse

no credit

Valentine's Day, 2012: Three of the persecuted Feminist Five demonstrate against domestic violence.

Kumm/picture alliance

1990 East Berlin protest against imposition of West German anti-abortion law. Banner asks Minister-President: "But what if the condom had a hole, 'dear' Lothar, what then?"

motherhood means feminists are led into the open arms of the capitalist class who prefer women remain exploitable while championing the "freedoms" of bourgeois women. An alliance of feminists with the Chinese capitalist class means preparing the way for the destruction of socialized property in China, which would throw back women's conditions even further.

After the return of capitalism in the former Soviet Union and workers states of East Europe, women were not liberated but bore the brunt of the ensuing social decay. Massive deindustrialization threw women out of the workforce and drove them back to "Kinder, Küche, Kirche" (children, kitchen, church). Religion festered once again with support from the newly installed capitalist states. Gone were quick divorces, accessible abortions, heavily subsidized rents and free childcare and healthcare—all liquidated along with the workers states. Despite the Stalinist bureaucracy's enforcement of the family as the "fighting unit for socialism" and the material poverty of the workers states relative to the West, the collectivized economy made it possible for women to achieve social and economic independence beyond what women experienced in the wealthiest capitalist countries. Feminists, in allying with the imperialists for counterrevolution, mobilized for one of the single most regressive social transformations for women.

Without a perspective to link women's emancipation with the defense of the Chinese Revolution, feminists are left with the blunt instrument of moralism to confront nationalism, thereby deepening the divide between petty-bourgeois women who look to the West and working-class people who see the CPC as essential to combat hostile U.S. imperialism. Against the feminist approach, which relies on forming alliances based on who has more progressive ideas about women, revolutionaries must rebuild the women's movement on the basis of an anti-imperialist program. It will only be possible to break through Chinese nationalism by uniting with the working masses who have a material interest in fighting to confront the CPC, rebuilding public services, and socializing the functions of the family.

Maoist Opposition

In reaction to the embrace of feminism by the imperialists and some Chinese capitalists, a significant Maoist current has sought to criticize feminism from a class standpoint. While many Maoists recognize the petty-bourgeois character of the feminist movement and the cynical way capitalists use feminism to attract a female consumer base, they draw the wrong political conclusions that women's rights are a distraction from the class struggle and will be achieved merely by further social development. If Marxists pursue radical anti-capitalist measures but have no program to fight for women's liberation through means which unite the working class and oppressed as a whole, the antagonism between men and women will remain. This is why the women's movement has come to be dominated by pro-Western liberal feminists. What the Maoists dismiss is the need to combine the struggles for women's liberation and for broader national development by opposing the CPC's accommodation of world imperialism.

For many Maoists, the Cultural Revolution offers an example of how the women's movement should go forward in connection with the class struggle. However, the Cultural Revolution demonstrates that the key obstacle to national development and women's liberation is the isolation of the Chinese workers state and the CPC's strangulation of any

Pictures from History

August 1968: Red Guards mobilize to shame "capitalist roaders" in ideological purge of Mao's opponents.

possibility for international revolution. Pushed out of the ruling circle of the CPC following the disastrous Great Leap Forward, Mao sought to reassert his power by appealing to the anti-bureaucratic left-wing sentiments of the youth who were disaffected by the stiff social hierarchy of New China. Rather than extend the conquests of the revolution internationally, Mao sought to mobilize the Chinese masses in an ideological purge of elements within the party that opposed him, who he claimed were an emerging capitalist class. While Mao and the "rightists" in the party pursued different strategies, both sought to defend China in a way that upheld the privileges of the bureaucracy. Constrained by their alliance with Mao, Red Guards could only combat capitalist ***ideas*** through moralist purges of "capitalist roaders" rather than create the material conditions to tackle the roots of the bureaucracy by overcoming the isolation of the workers state. The limitations of their allegiance to Mao led the Red Guards down a more and more hysterical path, turning against working people and dividing the country between wings of the party rather than uniting workers and students in political struggle against the bureaucracy. The idealist strategy of the Cultural Revolution was not unlike that of the feminists, attempting to purge those whom they claim have reactionary ideas rather than putting forward a program to unite the working class around their common needs. As a result, both could only deepen the divisions within the working class.

Nevertheless, Mao had unleashed a powerful mass movement which had been ignited by the limitations of "socialism in one country" and when he felt his power was secured, he mobilized the People's Liberation Army to bloodily repress it. This was because Mao's autarkic model and the CPC opposition to him both proceeded from the need to maintain peaceful coexistence with imperialism, a fact which was graphically shown a few years later when Mao sought the friendship of Richard Nixon and U.S. imperialism against the Soviet Union—during U.S. imperialism's war in Vietnam no less.

For many women, the Cultural Revolution was a massively politicizing event. They attacked the "Four Olds" (old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits) together with male Red Guards and vowed to destroy everything that survived from backward, prerevolutionary China. The Red Guards and mass media emphasized that women should devote themselves to political and military work. However, the Stalinist program of Mao and the CPC relies on the family as an essential tool for promoting social cohesion and obedience. Even as collectivized property provides the basis to socially integrate women, the bureaucracy can only remain in power by suppressing the political development of the working masses and especially working women.

A Perspective to Go Forward

Women's liberation is not possible without confronting the imperialist system which oppresses China and isolates it on the global stage, exacerbating all the contradictions which the CPC has maintained in society. Nor can the working class wrest political power from the CPC without taking up the cause of women's liberation.

The women's movement must link up with the working class in fighting for ***free healthcare, free childcare, and full retirement benefits for the elderly.*** This would not only take the burden of care off the shoulders of women, but also provide a higher standard of living for the whole working class and peasantry. While women drown under the weight of the family, high unemployment is destroying the futures of millions of youth. In fighting to build up social services, the women's movement can mobilize the unemployed to fight for jobs in socialized care, education for new workers, and the construction of new facilities.

A strong Chinese women's movement would also rally women internationally, particularly in Asia and the Third World, to fight for a revolutionary working-class answer to their oppression. Rather than the CPC's strategy of building alliances with the national elites in the Global South at the expense of the workers, revolutionaries should fight to extend China's productive capacity to the Third World in a way that strengthens the working class. For example, by ***building factories under fully unionized conditions and bringing women into the organized workforce.*** This can provide a concrete alternative to the pro-Western strategy of the feminists, which divides the working class and cannot link the struggles for women's and national liberation.

The CPC's nationalist strategy means strangling the working class and reinforcing the family in favor of illusory "peace" with world imperialism. Only by counterposing itself to the CPC can the Chinese women's movement find steadfast allies in the working class. ***Onward to an international anti-imperialist women's movement!*** ■

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SPARTACIST

MEXICO

For the Right of Self-Defense

Guns for Women!

The article printed below is a translation of a 19 August 2023 supplement of El Antiimperialista, *publication of the Grupo Espartaquista de México, the ICL's Mexican section.*

The situation of women in Mexico is simply horrible: domestic violence, rapes, forced disappearances, murders. Such is the case of Milagros Monserrat, who was stabbed and bled to death in broad daylight in the streets of León, Guanajuato last August 10. It is clear women are urgently calling for an end to this. But how? We call for ***guns for women*** as an immediate demand for women to protect themselves from brutal daily violence. Women being armed would have a direct impact on the number of attacks by making potential aggressors think twice before acting. As they say: God created man and woman, and Samuel Colt made them equal.

1918 Soviet poster: "Women Workers Take Up Your Rifles!"

With this call, we directly challenge the macho paternalism that presents women as having to depend on men and the bourgeois state for their defense. At the same time, our call is counterposed to the bankrupt schemes pushed by feminists and populists: calls for more security (which means more police in the streets), separation of men and women on transportation and at marches, minimal reforms that they beg the government to implement. The call to arm women challenges the monopoly of violence of the Mexican capitalist state—the police, prisons, army and courts—which serves to maintain the rule and profits of the exploiting class. The state's interest is not in fighting for women's liberation, but in perpetuating oppression.

Arming women would provide an immediate response to the epidemic of violent attacks against them, but it does not resolve the issue. The overwhelming majority of violence against women comes from domestic abuse by partners and the family itself. A gun would help in some cases. But these situations are complicated, and addressing them is not simply a question of physical defense against violence.

The brutal conditions of women in Mexico are a direct product of the country's social backwardness, which is caused by imperialist subjugation of the entire nation. This can be seen most clearly in the extreme backwardness of the countryside and the miserable conditions of the peasantry and indigenous people, but also in the big cities with their great social inequality. To resolve the question not only of violence against women, but also of their oppression in general, it is necessary to raise the level of the country's social development. To do so, the resources and infrastructure must be wrested from the imperialists' hands. Combating the oppression of women requires a massive improvement in public services: free, quality healthcare, education for all, day care centers, public dining halls. All this would contribute to eliminating the domestic slavery to which women are condemned.

Separating the struggle for women's liberation from the struggle for social and national emancipation condemns it to failure. This is exactly what the feminist program promotes; it divides society along gender lines, not class lines. Feminism is an ***obstacle*** to women's liberation because it breaks up class unity. The situation of women can truly be improved only through a struggle against imperialism and capitalism. If it is understood that the struggles for social, national and women's emancipation are inseparable, it is clear that male workers are essential to the cause of women. It is also clear that it has to go in both directions. Men must be won to the perspective of the ***full social emancipation*** of women in order to achieve the social and national emancipation of the workers themselves. The struggle for women's liberation will succeed only under a communist banner. ■

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INDIA

R.G. Kar Rape and Murder

Das/SOPA

Kolkata, 1 September 2024: Protest against rape and murder of a young woman doctor at R.G. Kar hospital.

What Should Communists Do?

BY MANSA KAUR

India's repertoire of horrific rape cases is growing at a rapid rate. Every Indian woman knows of the brutal 2012 gang rape and murder known as Nirbhaya that shook the entire country. Then came Badaun in 2014 where two Dalit sisters were gang raped then hanged to death from a tree. Unnao followed in 2017 where an elected Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) representative raped a young woman who later attempted to self-immolate. 2018 gave us Kathua, where an 8-year-old Kashmiri Muslim girl was gang raped and killed by seven Hindu men as a means of intimidating the community. 2020 brought Hathras, where a young Dalit woman was gang raped by four upper-caste men, simply because they felt they could. She also died. The list goes on.

These are a fraction of names from recent memory that made national and international news owing to their gruesome nature. The reality is far bleaker, especially for Dalit, low-caste, minority and working women. According to a 2018 government report, a rape was reported every 15 minutes on average that year—and those are just the ones that were reported. The latest case to gain national attention is R.G. Kar, named after the hospital in West Bengal where a young woman doctor was raped and murdered by a volunteer cop as she was trying to get some sleep after a 36-hour shift.

This latest case saw a repeat of the same pattern that erupts in Indian politics every time a rape becomes national news: huge protests break out, only to die down some weeks later, having changed ***nothing*** in the slightest. The bubbling anger gets channeled into the courts and mainstream discourse amounts to debating the severity of the punishment: is it death or life imprisonment? Meanwhile, establishment political parties use these horrific incidents to undercut one another, blaming their opponents in government for this or

Abidi/Reuters

December 2012: Mass rally following Nirbhaya gang rape is attacked by police in Delhi.

that failure in the hopes that they can ride to power next time.

Drowned in this mess, the left plays an utterly hopeless role, offering no clear path forward for the women masses other than outrage, calling on the state for protection, or publishing tirades about how all oppressions are interlinked and the need for united struggle. ***Yes, there is such a need. But what should communists do to advance this struggle now?*** Any left group worthy of its name must be able to chart a ***concrete course of action*** in defense of women, not merely on the job, on the streets, but ***also*** against the most heinous of crimes against their bodies! To see how the left once again failed to advance the cause of women, let us first turn to the particular dynamics of the R.G. Kar movement and offer our own view on the role of communists therein.

An "Apolitical" Movement in Defense of Women

When news broke about R.G. Kar and the attempted cover-up by the hospital administration and police, it unleashed deep anger, bringing people from all layers of society on to the streets in major cities in India. In Kolkata, protests were led by the doctors' union at R.G. Kar hospital and feminists under the slogan "Reclaim the Night."

Dominated by petty-bourgeois educated professionals and feminists, the movement centered around various liberal demands to the state and the hospital to address the plight of women: to have more CCTVs and bathrooms; increased police presence, especially female cops; to fill the vacant positions for healthcare staff; to provide more public transit at late hours, etc. While some of these demands are supportable, the main problem is that the perspective from which they stem is based upon ***reliance on government institutions***, such as the cops and courts, whose central function is to defend the existing social order. Time and time again, these institutions have not only done nothing to help women, but have often colluded in covering up violence against them.

This fundamentally liberal perspective was reflected in the fact that the movement declared itself consciously "apolitical." As one journalist notes: "the 'apolitical' character of the protests has been its main currency. The participants—whether the junior doctors or people hitting the streets in solidarity—are resisting politicisation attempts by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), the two main Opposition parties" (*The Wire*, 15 September 2024).

There is a contradiction here which is important to understand. On the one hand, the opposition to "politicization" stemmed from people being completely fed up with the main parties and saw them as part of the problem. In this sense, the sentiment behind attempts to keep it apolitical indicated a thirst for a real alternative. However, at the same time, this movement was in the hands of the urban petty bourgeoisie which has an interest in keeping the anger of the broad masses contained in order to maintain its own leadership. The insistence on staying "apolitical" on the part of the organizers of the movement was in fact an abdication of the struggle to find a genuine solution to the problem, and thus kept the movement stuck in its liberal-feminist tracks.

There is no vacuum in politics. Lacking a viable and meaningful alternative that could advance the material interests of the working masses and women, the door was wide open for reactionary views to enter the fray. Indeed, the Hindu-chauvinist BJP benefited from the "apolitical" nature of this movement as it was able to appeal to certain conservative segments of the movement through its emphasis on traditional family values, whereby the well-being of women is achieved through submission to father, brother or husband, and sometimes even the son.

After weeks of protests, what did this "apolitical" movement achieve? Nothing that actually advances the fight for women's conditions. Instead, the case has been used as a political football between the ruling party in West Bengal and the BJP, which is trying to win the state elections next year. The anger has been channeled into a state inquiry.

And having lost steam, the protest movement has retreated onto college campuses. This is liberal feminism in action. But that events unfolded this way and not otherwise is squarely due to the failure of the left.

A Communist Answer

Every time a horrific rape occurs, the left melts seamlessly into the movement. It becomes difficult to distinguish the left from liberals and feminists because it typically does not have a qualitatively different answer for fighting back against the most intimate and violent crime against women.

It should be the exact opposite. The role of communists is to show why a genuine answer is one based on a ***proletarian strategy***. In the R.G. Kar movement, this meant putting forward a program that could link the burning needs of the women masses, brought to the surface by this case, with broader social discontent, fusing the two to present a real alternative to the hell that is life in India. As an example of what such a program could look like, we propose the following four demands.

Open the police and administration files. This horrific incident was covered up by those in charge. Demand that the police and the hospital open up their files to scrutiny so the public can know the whole truth. Anyone who opposes this elementary demand is not on the side of women.

For the right of women to bear arms. Unless you're a Bollywood star or Nita Ambani, India is hell for women. A deeply felt demand that emerges every time a rape happens is to "end rape culture" in the hopes that if only enough people demonstrated and explained why rape is bad, then gradually women's safety would become a reality. This won't happen so long as India remains defined by mass poverty and scarcity of resources that are responsible for the brutal conditions of women. An immediate step to combat the impunity with which women are attacked is to arm women—whether day or night, anyone in a bus or on a street or in a hospital will think twice about their decisions if they are facing an equal threat to their own personal safety (see article on page 8).

Unions must control safety and working conditions. R.G. Kar and most public hospitals are falling apart. There isn't enough time and space for doctors to rest or do their jobs safely. Management squeezes doctors, especially junior doctors, to compensate for the lack of resources. As a result, healthcare workers other than the top doctors not only work in poor conditions, but are worked to the bone. The R.G. Kar case poses a basic question: who should run hospitals? ***Workers*** must be in charge of deciding safety and working conditions, not management or the state! Form shop floor committees of workers from all departments, including nurses, cleaning and maintenance.

For a massive jobs program to address the crisis of healthcare and unemployment. Not only is healthcare non-existent for the broad masses, India also faces a mass unemployment crisis. An obvious solution to both is massive investment in healthcare to build more hospitals and facilities so the public can have adequate access, to deliver free training for all healthcare jobs so people can get qualified, and to guarantee well-paying jobs for all new trainees so that work can be spread out among healthcare workers. But neither Mamata, nor Modi nor Rahul Gandhi can deliver this because doing so demands a huge encroachment on the interests of those

Kakade/AP

Doctors and medical students from Mumbai's government hospital protest deadly rape at R.G. Kar, 16 August 2024.

they serve: the Indian capitalists and foreign corporations. For a working-class opposition to all the mainstream parties!

The Mini-Maxi Left

In contrast to the demands of the liberals who rely on the government, our demands insist on the need for the masses to rely on their own strength. From our point of view, only such a strategy can polarize the movement along ***class lines*** and break the masses away from the petty-bourgeois liberal program that constrained the movement. This was what communists needed to do. What did the left actually do?

The Hopeless Stalinists

One trend on the left is the class-collaborationist "minimum" wing that completely liquidated into the movement, becoming its left tail as it cheered on its main slogans and politics. This includes the Indian Stalinists, such as the CPI(M), which has maligned the term communist. It "demand[ed] that the central government act urgently to enact an appropriate law." Calling on a Hindu-chauvinist anti-woman government to protect women is bad enough, but since the crusty Bhadralok Stalinists in the Polit Bureau couldn't even be bothered to specify ***which*** law, this three-paragraph statement cannot even be characterized as a left intervention.

The Feminist Stalinists

Another minimum trend is the CPI(ML) Liberation, the slightly left cousin of the CPI(M), which was more energetic in its liquidation. Activists from its student wing, All India Students Association (AISA), became co-organizers of the "Reclaim the Night" protests alongside the feminists, pushing the same politics. According to them, what is needed are "special initiatives…to increase sensitization within the police administration and ensure equal participation of all gender identities at all levels of the force."

CPI(ML) Liberation

West Bengal, 2 September 2024: CPI(ML) Liberation general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya marches in R.G. Kar protest. Liberation, cosponsor of "Reclaim the Night" protests, pushes dead-end feminist politics.

This is an utterly scandalous position for any organization calling itself "communist." It spreads the deadly illusion that women will be defended through changing the gender composition of the ***armed enforcers*** of the Hindu-chauvinist Brahminical patriarchal Indian ***state*** whose institutions have time and again ***blatantly*** defended perpetrators of violence against women. Consider the recent ruling by the Chhattisgarh High Court that acquitted a married man who anally raped his wife by fisting her repeatedly, landing her in medical care where she eventually died.

As for hiring more women cops—they are in fact ***more*** brutal toward women because they view it as their special duty to put women in their place. And they do this with impunity since it is done woman to woman and doesn't have the same social stigma as a male cop beating a woman. Calling for more women cops is the grossest capitulation to the urban petty-bourgeois feminists who understand nothing of the reality of the poor toiling women workers.

A Missed Opportunity for Trotskyists

The trend in opposition to the Stalinists is much smaller, but politically more interesting. This is the "maximalist" trend best exemplified in this case by a small Trotskyist group in Kolkata called the Communist League (CL). In their latest propaganda, they correctly talk about turning the movement into a united struggle of the masses against capitalism. As we understand it, they correctly criticize the Stalinists, the main force on the left, noting that:

> "No left party is carrying out any in-depth propaganda among people linking these matters to the capitalist system.... The indifferent attitude of leftists towards this Marxist approach has acted as a hindrance to bringing political consciousness among the common people.... While keeping a distance from the bourgeois parties, the leftist parties are bankrupt on the question of the need to play a central role in the movements for democratic demands." (our translation)
>
> —"The R.G. Kar Movement: A Review," January 2025

This raises the question: what did the CL do to link the R.G. Kar struggle to an anti-capitalist perspective? How did it try and take a leading role in this movement for democratic rights? On this score, we are left disappointed.

The maximum answer we find is a declaration that there is a need for united struggle and to raise the red flag of the international working class. But what is completely lacking is a concrete course of action that could advance the movement in opposition to the liberals and their Stalinist tails who were holding it back by rerouting it into legalistic and governmental avenues.

To advance the movement and take a leading role, what was needed was to provide working-class answers to the ***immediate needs felt by women***—safety from the danger of rape—and tie them to the broader struggle against the ruling class. This could have channeled the energy of the protests into a ***working-class alternative*** to the status quo parties, in opposition to which the movement declared itself "apolitical." And this would have opened up the possibility of a class differentiation within the movement, thus giving Trotskyists a real hearing in a region once politically dominated by Stalinists, thereby advancing the struggle for Trotskyism in India.

R.G. Kar was a historic opportunity. The case unleashed a burst of elemental anger not seen in West Bengal since the CPI(M) crushed the 2007 Nandigram protests. That this opportunity was ***missed*** is due to the failure of small groups like the CL to chart a concrete course of action that links the immediate struggles to a proletarian perspective.

* * *

The R.G. Kar movement is flatlining. It is good that leftists and students on college campuses want to carry on the struggle. But to go forward, they must confront the reasons behind its dissipation. It can still be revived, but only if it has a clear political answer that can link the burning needs of women to the necessity for a struggle against the entire foundations of Indian capitalism. This article has sought to provide such an answer. ■

A WORD FROM COMRADE LENIN

The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion

We print below an excerpt from a 13 May 1909 article by V.I. Lenin.

Social-Democracy bases its whole world-outlook on scientific socialism, i.e., Marxism. The philosophical basis of Marxism, as Marx and Engels repeatedly declared, is dialectical materialism, which has fully taken over the historical traditions of eighteenth-century materialism in France and of Feuerbach (first half of the nineteenth century) in Germany—a materialism which is absolutely atheistic and positively hostile to all religion.... Religion is the opium of the people—this dictum by Marx is the corner-stone of the whole Marxist outlook on religion. Marxism has always regarded all modern religions and churches, and each and every religious organisation, as instruments of bourgeois reaction that serve to defend exploitation and to befuddle the working class.

At the same time Engels frequently condemned the efforts of people who desired to be "more left" or "more revolutionary" than the Social-Democrats to introduce into the programme of the workers' party an explicit proclamation of atheism, in the sense of declaring war on religion. Commenting in 1874 on the famous manifesto of the Blanquist fugitive Communards who were living in exile in London, Engels called their vociferous proclamation of war on religion a piece of stupidity, and stated that such a declaration of war was the best way to revive interest in religion and to prevent it from really dying out. Engels blamed the Blanquists for being unable to understand that only the class struggle of the working masses could, by comprehensively drawing the widest strata of the proletariat into conscious and revolutionary social ***practice***, really free the oppressed masses from the yoke of religion, whereas to proclaim that war on religion was a political task of the workers' party was just anarchistic phrase-mongering. And in 1877, too, in his *Anti-Dühring*, while ruthlessly attacking the slightest concessions made by Dühring the philosopher to idealism and religion, Engels no less resolutely condemns Dühring's pseudo-revolutionary idea that religion should be prohibited in socialist society. To declare such a war on religion, Engels says, is to "out-Bismarck Bismarck", i.e., to repeat the folly of Bismarck's struggle against the clericals (the notorious "Struggle for Culture", *Kulturkampf*, i.e., the struggle Bismarck waged in the 1870s against the German Catholic party, the "Centre" party, by means of a police persecution of Catholicism). By this struggle Bismarck only ***stimulated*** the militant clericalism of the Catholics, and only injured the work of real culture, because he gave prominence to religious divisions rather than political divisions, and diverted the attention of some sections of the working class and of the other democratic elements away from the urgent tasks of the class and revolutionary struggle to the most superficial and false bourgeois anti-clericalism. Accusing the would-be ultra-revolutionary Dühring of wanting to repeat Bismarck's folly in another form, Engels insisted that the workers' party should have the ability to work patiently at the task of organising and educating the proletariat, which would lead to the dying out of religion, and not throw itself into the gamble of a political war on religion. This view has become part of the very essence of German Social-Democracy, which, for example, advocated freedom for the Jesuits, their admission into Germany, and the complete abandonment of police methods of combating any particular religion. "Religion is a private matter": this celebrated point in the Erfurt Programme (1891) summed up these political tactics of Social-Democracy.

These tactics have by now become a matter of routine; they have managed to give rise to a new distortion of Marxism in the opposite direction, in the direction of opportunism. This point in the Erfurt Programme has come to be interpreted as meaning that we Social-Democrats, our Party, ***consider*** religion to be a private matter, that religion is a private matter for us as Social-Democrats, for us as a party. Without entering into a direct controversy with this opportunist view, Engels in the nineties deemed it necessary to oppose it resolutely in a positive, and not a polemical form. To wit: Engels did this in the form of a statement, which he deliberately underlined, that Social-Democrats regard religion as a private matter ***in relation to the state***,

continued on page 38

P.A. Otsup

Lenin in his study in the Kremlin, October 1918.

Transgender Liberation:

Graphic by Joe Sol

Liberal Betrayal, Marxist Answers

Back in power, Donald Trump lost no time in unleashing a torrent of anti-trans measures. This escalates a trend seen around the world. Reactionaries of every stripe point to the relatively limited gains made by trans people as proof of the moral and social degeneracy of the West. More than any other group, trans people have felt the drastic right-wing shift in political winds. Parties and public figures which not so long ago had a liberal stance on the transgender question are now frantically trying to distance themselves. They started by avoiding the question. But very quickly, yesterday's liberals are joining the reactionary chorus, understanding that their establishment careers depend on it.

Why is the transgender movement such a focal point for reaction? While the LGBTQ+ movement is keenly aware of the sea change in public opinion, it generally cannot explain the reasons for this change. As a result, there is currently no coherent perspective for how to fight back in this hostile environment. The transgender movement finds itself increasingly isolated and politically disoriented, unsure of what to do or who to trust.

The Marxist movement has so far not been able to fill this vacuum. Many self-proclaimed Marxists openly embrace reactionary anti-trans positions, using analytical methods closer to those of the Catholic church than to any serious Marxist theoretician. A lot of Marxist parties are simply silent on the question. Those that aren't and that have denounced the attacks against trans people have not provided serious answers or perspectives. Generally, they simply add elements of Marxist verbiage and analysis onto a fundamentally liberal program.

The present article is a contribution toward filling this void. In the first instance, it will provide a materialist explanation for the current culture wars, explaining why they are taking place now and why they cannot be countered with liberal gradualist means. Secondly, it will provide a basic Marxist understanding of the trans question counter-

AP

White House

Anita Bryant's crusade against homosexuality, 1977. White House lit up with the LGBT rainbow as same-sex marriage is legalized, June 2015.

posed to the reactionary empiricism of the anti-trans discourse as well as to the liberal idealism of the mainstream pro-trans movement. From these two pillars, we will then start building the scaffold of a working-class program for transgender liberation applied to the context of mounting reaction and liberal backstabbing.

Part One: Gradualism and the Tides of History

In recent decades the mainstream view in the LGBTQ+ movement has been that history has its ups and its downs but, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr., "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Gays and lesbians faced intense periods of moral hysteria in the 1950s and late 1970s, but eventually attitudes and policies liberalized. Now, in many societies they are part of the mainstream and accepted across the political spectrum. The idea was, and for some still is, that the same will happen for trans people: despite the current setback, sooner or later we will get back on track.

Already this refrain is ringing hollow to many transgender people, and they are looking to the left for more radical answers. Even left-liberal author Shon Faye writes in her informative book *The Transgender Issue* (Allen Lane, 2021) that "there can be no trans liberation under capitalism." However, this increased radicalism does not necessarily translate into revolutionary conclusions. For example, Faye also writes that "the only hope trans people have of achieving beneficial policy changes enacted in Parliament is through internal lobbying and, ultimately, the election of the Labour Party." This shows that one can in general believe that capitalism is incompatible with trans rights but concretely speaking still view gradual social reform rather than revolution as the road forward.

Therefore, it is not enough for Marxists to state the platitude that trans or women's liberation is incompatible with capitalism. It is necessary to show ***why*** revolutionary working-class methods are necessary to achieve liberation ***as opposed to*** liberal reformist means. To do this we must take on the underlying illusion that progress for LGBTQ+ people was possible before and will surely be possible again. We will do this by showing the specific circumstances that made these reforms possible in the first place, how those circumstances are rapidly disappearing and why it is suicidal to think they will come back.

From Reaction to Liberalism

To understand how the condition of sexually oppressed groups has evolved over time, it is necessary to go beyond the ideas and attitudes in individuals' heads. Marx famously stated that the "ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling ***material*** force of society is at the same time its ruling ***intellectual*** force" ("Theses on Feuerbach," 1845). Since the Second World War, the American capitalist class is the class that has dominated the world economically, politically and militarily. Because of this, the dominant ideas on sexuality have evolved in tandem with the interests and aims of U.S. imperialism.

During the high points of the Cold War, when capitalist domination was threatened, the priority for U.S. imperialism was to ensure internal stability in the face of an external enemy. It is no coincidence that the Lavender Scare in the 1950s—the moral panic about gays in the U.S. government—was joined at the hip to the anti-Communist McCarthy witchhunts. Nor is it a coincidence that Anita Bryant's crusade against homosexuality in the late 1970s intersected the need for the U.S. to recover from the political and military setbacks it suffered in the '60s and '70s.

As a rule, there is no more potent weapon to smash the left and unify a country for reactionary aims than to lean on the most conservative social prejudices regarding sexuality and the family. Many militant working-class activists ready to suffer beatings and jail for their convictions crumble at the hint of being associated with sexual deviations. U.S. rulers have a long history of using moral panics over sexual deviance as an instrument of social control.

That said, after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the U.S. no longer had a formidable external enemy to mobilize against. Rather, its aim was to expand its economic and social influence in every corner of the planet. In this context the universalist principles of freedom, democracy and human rights were the perfect ideological tools to justify U.S. interference and domination. Moreover, with class

June 2014 issue of *Time*.

struggle at an ebb and no serious geopolitical rivals, the U.S. ruling class could afford looser social norms domestically and could unchain the wild and profitable spirits of consumeristic individuality.

However, despite all the speeches about enlightenment and freedom in the 1990s, liberalization of homosexuality, in particular the right to marriage, was still considered taboo by most of the political establishment in the U.S. It was only following the 2008 financial crisis, when Obama was president, that same-sex marriage was legalized. At the time, the ruling class needed to bring down the conditions of the working class while keeping the peace through an aura of progressivism. Reforms on social questions such as marriage were perfect since they cost nothing in economic terms and were natural extensions of the liberal principles of tolerance and free individual choice. Paradoxically, it is only because of the literal bankruptcy of the liberal world order that the capitalist class could advance as far as it did toward sexual liberalization.

Similar reforms were made around the Western world during this period, for example, in France, Germany and Britain. As the economic backbone of Western dominance eroded and the imperialist ruling classes attacked material living conditions, they relied more and more on liberal ideas to compensate for their declining power. This is why pro-LGBTQ+ discourse became mainstream in the cultural and political sphere of most Western countries: sitcoms featured gay protagonists, and it became the norm for corporations, politicians and cops to march in Pride parades. On top of providing a hypocritical veneer of progressiveness, such liberal positioning offered a convenient stick with which to beat workers, immigrants and Third World countries; any form of opposition to the liberal status quo could be easily countered with charges of backwardness and chauvinism.

So, while social liberalization is certainly progressive, the underlying economic reasons it occurred in the early 21st century were rooted in regressive economic conditions and reactionary class interests. This does not negate the long and arduous struggles waged by generations of LGBTQ+ activists. Rather, it explains why they were able to succeed to the degree that they did and why the movement became less radical and increasingly compatible with corporate capitalism.

The Trans Question and the Decline of U.S. Hegemony

Overall, the conditions for trans people followed the same general path as for gays and lesbians, but with a significant delay. Trans rights and public awareness of the question were only making their first inroads into the mainstream at the time right-wing populist reaction started to gain momentum. In 2014 *Time* magazine featured a cover with transgender actress Laverne Cox that read "The Transgender Tipping Point—America's next civil rights frontier." One year later Donald Trump announced his first bid to become president.

As it happens, the trans issue wasn't just American liberalism's next frontier but really its last frontier. That is the farthest it could push sexual liberalization before hitting a wall. Liberals went as far as they did on LGBTQ+ and other social issues to compensate for their declining social influence. But while the liberals were going further and further, the backlash to liberalism was only growing stronger and stronger. Conservative social forces sense this growing weakness and are using the trans question as a political battering ram against the liberal status quo of the past decades.

On the one hand, the trans question embodies the limits of liberal reformism over the question of sexuality. The notion of free choice and tolerance runs up against the economic and social limits of capitalism. Scarcity of material resources and vested conservative interests make it ultimately impossible to transcend a social organization based on the monogamous heterosexual family—a question we will explore in more detail below.

But at the same time, the trans question today also embodies the limits of the liberal world order that the United States

Gregory/Getty

Trump announces first presidential candidacy, June 2015.

built following the Second World War. We have reached a point where the economic and social pillars of this order clash with the interests of the ruling class that established them. Increasingly, liberalism has become an unnecessary nuisance in the drive to restore the U.S. position in the world. If the trans issue is such a flash point in the culture wars, it is because it stands at the border between the liberal order of U.S. imperial hegemony and the emerging order of reaction born out of U.S. imperial decline.

As for broad sections of the working class, liberalism has come to symbolize everything they hate about the status quo. For decades they were told to swallow economic attacks and a decomposing social fabric in the name of empty ideals. Now it is easy for the right to seize on this discontent to foster a generalized social backlash. The immediate targets are minorities, but the real aim is to put Western imperialism on a more bellicose course against the working class at home and rivals abroad. With both the ruling class and the working class moving away from the status quo of the past decades, the social order that made limited reforms for LGBTQ+ people possible is entering terminal crisis. This is the underlying factor behind the raging conflict over the trans question.

The only prospect for substantial gains for women and sexual minorities would be through a renewed and sustained period of global economic prosperity. However, this is completely ruled out given that the U.S. capitalists are intent on maintaining their grip on the world and can only do so by increasing national competition and generally driving down living standards (see "The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony & the Struggle for Workers Power," *Spartacist* No. 68, September 2023). Ultimately, it is the economic realities of a world ruled by imperialism that rule out serious gains for any oppressed group, not to speak of a gradualist and reformist path for trans liberation.

Part Two: Untangling Gender

The Conflict Behind the Gender Wars

Much of the debate over the trans question revolves around definitions. Before diving into these turbulent waters, it is important to look at the political issues that stand behind the battles over gender, sex and biology. Much of the literature on the question starts with definitions as a basis to argue a distinct political perspective. While this appears logical on the face of it, really it covers the debate with a false sense of objectivity. Underlying the clash of definitions is a clash of interests. So, before we provide our own answers and definitions, we will identify the political objectives of the trans and anti-trans movements, as well as our own communist worldview.

As the word "transgender" implies, trans people are individuals who wish to be socially recognized as a gender distinct from that in which they have been hitherto socialized. As such, the transgender movement as a political movement seeks to make it possible and socially acceptable for individuals to make such transitions. The way in which it explains the world and the various arguments it elaborates are all derived from this political objective.

Those making up the anti-transgender movement, whether they be TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists), religiously based, male chauvinist or even pseudo-Marxist, are united in fighting against the social acceptance of trans people. Of course, these various strands have distinct and often conflicting interests. But they are united in wanting to make it more difficult or impossible for trans people to be socially accepted as the gender they identify as. The various theories and arguments they elaborate are all aimed toward this political goal.

Szymanowicz/Getty

Trans Pride demonstration, London, July 2024.

As we can see, even though much of the debate over the trans question focuses on biological sex versus gender, on the definition of womanhood and so on, this is not the heart of the matter. The issue is simply whether it is socially desirable and permissible for individuals to be allowed to transition from one gender to another. All the conflicts about concepts gravitate around this fundamental question.

As communists, our political aim is to achieve a fully egalitarian society of abundance, free of classes and all other forms of oppression, including those caused by the gendered division of society. Thus, our aims are compatible and overlap with those of the transgender movement. We unambiguously think that yes, individuals should be allowed to transition and in general do whatever they want with their own bodies. We also argue that society should facilitate this process. But more than this, we believe that the fight for sexual liberation—including trans liberation—is a cause which is not only compatible with the fight to emancipate the working class but integral to its day-to-day struggles in present society. In other words, the task is ***not*** to wait for the communist future but to fight today to advance this cause.

Where we distinguish ourselves as communists is that we view the struggle for trans liberation as part of a broader struggle for working-class emancipation. Crucially, we also diverge from the trans movement in the ***means and methods*** through which we seek to achieve our political objectives.

In our struggle, we are guided by the doctrine of scientific socialism also known as Marxism.

Biology and Society

Much of the discourse against greater social acceptability and integration of trans people revolves around biology. The basic argument is that there is an undeniable biological difference between men and women and that to argue that a trans woman is a woman is a rejection of basic science. This leads to the question always asked by bigoted talk show hosts or provocative YouTubers: "What is a woman?" Any answer that is not based on reasserting the essential biological difference between men and women is then mocked and dismissed.

While it is undeniable that there are fundamental and qualitative biological differences between men and women, these tell us very little about what it means to be a man or a woman in any given society. It is simply false to think that ***social relations*** are determined by ***biology***. In fact, human evolution itself belies this myth and shows a constant interaction between the development of culture and technique and changes to physical anatomy. For example, the development of language and the use of tools directly led to the growth of the human brain, i.e., culture changed biology. This goes to show that biology is not the decisive factor in understanding human social relations.

In the same way, biological differences between the sexes neither are independent from nor dictate social relations between men and women. The ability to carry babies has a significance across cultures, but what it means concretely to be a "woman" changes radically across cultures and epochs. Reasserting the biological characteristics of a female human says nothing about what it means to be a woman living in a modern Western society or a woman in a traditional village in sub-Saharan Africa. This is why it is misleading and counterproductive to focus the debate over the transgender question in modern capitalist societies on the anatomical differences between men and women.

The trick question "what is a woman?" seeks to merge the biological and social significance of being a woman. To answer it, one must untangle the two issues. Sometimes demagogues make this impossible. But too often it is the pro-trans voices themselves that contribute to confusing the matter.

Poster for movie by anti-trans political commentator Matt Walsh.

Spectrum and Dichotomy

In response to anti-trans ideologues and society in general insisting on the fact that there are fundamental biological differences between men and women, many trans intellectuals have misguidedly attacked the very idea that there is a dichotomy between male and female biology. Most will not deny that there are important differences between men and women, but they will insist that these are on a spectrum and that the sex binary is purely an invention. To support this argument, they will point to the great degree of variation in the physical characteristics of each sex and to the fact that for certain intersex people it is not possible to

Walker/AP

Gudkov/Alamy

Getty

Three human females.

unambiguously assign them as biologically male or female.

In his revolt against rigid social categories, trans academic Jack Halberstam goes so far as to attack the drive to ascribe "categories" to basically anything in the natural world:

> "The mania for the godlike function of naming began, unsurprisingly, with colonial exploration. As anyone who has visited botanical or zoological gardens knows, the collection, classification, and analysis of the world's flora and fauna has gone hand in hand with various forms of colonial expansion and enterprise."
>
> —*Trans** (University of California Press, 2018)

John G. Murdoch John Gould

Charles Darwin pioneered work on evolution of species. Sketches show different Galapagos finches evolved from a common ancestor.

While it is certainly true that science developed together with capitalism and its many crimes, the problem is not "naming" and "classification," or science for that matter. You simply cannot understand the world, natural or social, without categories and names. And if you cannot understand the world, you cannot change it.

The key point is that it is not in any way regressive to recognize that there are indeed a set of qualitative biological differences between men and women—or between plants. To accept a dichotomy does not undermine the fact that there is a great variation within categories or that there are certain specific cases that are difficult to classify. Everything in nature combines discrete categories and transitory, intermediate states.

For example, the evolution of species occurs through a process whereby the accumulation of minor genetic differences eventually leads to the emergence of a fundamentally different type of animal or plant. It is generally impossible to point to the exact moment when quantity passes into quality. But that does not negate the fact that at a certain point it becomes clear that a qualitative change has occurred. Just as we can say that a tiger and a lion are two different species, we can say that a male and female human are two different sexes. This does not mean that ligers or intersex people do not exist. But both are extreme variations within a dichotomy.

Variation and opposition coexist in everything. To deny the former leaves you with a rigid view of reality blind to change and contradictions. To deny the latter leaves you with an amorphous view of reality where everything is relative and subjective.

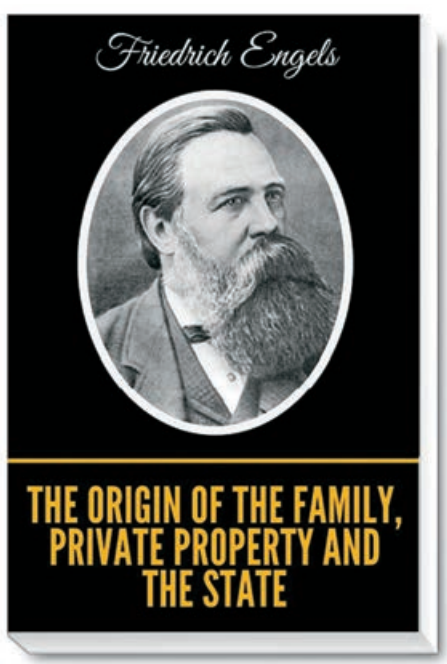
Bringing this back to the trans question, we have on the one hand anti-trans ideologues who view the world only through rigid biological categories. This leads them to reject or denounce certain contradictory situations, not least those in which humans consciously act to change elements of their physical and chemical existence to approximate the biological characteristics of a different sex. On the other hand, we have many trans activists who deny any qualitative difference at all between sexes, leaving them unable to intelligently address the realities of the physical and social world.

The trans movement has no need to reject the sexual binary to advance its cause. Quite the contrary, a better scientific understanding of the biological differences between men and women could conceivably lead to one day overcoming biological sexual differences altogether. The obstacle to this outcome and to trans liberation more generally does not, however, lie in current scientific limitations but in capitalist ***social relations***.

Capitalism and Gender

The most common argument of anti-trans advocates is that "a man is a man" and "a woman is a woman," that everyone knows this to be true and that you cannot change from one to another. For them, anyone contesting these obvious "facts" lives in la-la-land. In a sense, the most basic argument against this reasoning is that there are plenty of trans people who live their lives every day without anyone noticing or caring that they are trans. In actual fact, it is clearly possible to socially transition from one gender to another. This, of course, does not settle the debate. At bottom, the anti-trans movement thinks that such transitions are detrimental to society and should either be halted altogether or severely limited.

This raises the questions "Why is there so much resistance to transitioning?" and "Why does the argument that



transitioning is impossible hold so much sway?" To answer, we must start with the fact that the ideas regarding gender roles, sexuality and gender transition do not simply originate in the heads of individuals but are a reflection of society as it is currently organized.

In his brilliant book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Friedrich Engels explains how women's oppression, that is, unequal gender relations, is rooted in the advent of class society and the development of the patriarchal family. From the epoch of slavery all the way to modern capitalist societies, this form of the family has been the basic unit of social organization.

Every modern capitalist society is organized around a norm consisting of a heterosexual monogamous couple raising children to whom they will bequeath their property (if they have any). It is in the private realm of the family that essential tasks such as child-rearing, education, care and domestic work are provided, centrally by women. This family structure is an essential institution of capitalism. At the same time, modern capitalism undermines the foundations of the institution by providing women with a degree of financial independence, breaking down the role of the church and developing individuality. But while the norm can be undermined, sometimes to a significant degree, this cannot provide the social conditions necessary to fully replace the social role that the family plays.

Galai/Getty

Getty

Aydian Dowling (left), Poyd Treechada. Are they trans? Does it matter?

In simpler terms, the family can be replaced only to the degree that its tasks are taken over by society. The more there is socialized healthcare and education, the less these rest on the family. The more individuals are free from economic competition and want, the more they will be free to associate and live in whatever way they want with whomever they want. The problem, of course, is that capitalism can at most only begin to provide such conditions. In the current period of capitalist decline, with the productive forces contracting, we will only see a rollback of whatever has been gained, and an ever-greater reliance on the basic family structure. It is this reality that is behind the global crisis in healthcare, education and care for the elderly.

Moreover, capitalists have a direct interest in upholding the traditional heterosexual family for both political reasons (to reinforce social compliance) and economic reasons—to raise and maintain a large workforce. These factors point to the growing hysteria against transgender people as only the beginning of a wave of reaction which will ultimately be directed against women and everyone who does not narrowly conform to the rigid standards of the monogamous family.

In Western societies, Christianity has been in the front line of the anti-trans campaign. Through its unchanging moral codes dictated by God himself, religion offers a doctrine that enshrines the sanctity of private property, the subordination of women to men and, naturally, the impermeability of one's gender. Religion as an institution always provides the most consistent voice in defense of the patriarchal family and a foundation for conservative social norms and values.

Karahalis/AP

Athens, Greece: Reactionaries protest same-sex marriage, February 2024.

However, just as capitalism erodes the pillars of the heterosexual family, so too does it undermine the hold of religion. In most Western societies, the realities of modern life have led to a majority not adhering to rigid interpretation of religious text. Even among religious people there has been growing acceptance of equality between men and women, gay and lesbian rights and, until recently, of transgender rights as well.

On their own, religious arguments have not been the most effective in fostering the anti-trans backlash. Rather, where traditional conservative thought has been able to connect with more modern ideological discourse is through the defense of woman-

hood. Ironically, when it comes to the trans question, feminism has been an auxiliary to the very patriarchal values it seeks to challenge.

Why Do TERFs Exist?

In Britain, considered by many to be the epicenter of the anti-trans backlash, much of the debate has been between pro-trans advocates and feminist women who sometimes consider themselves progressive or even leftist, i.e., the so-called TERFs. The underlying feminist argument against increasing trans rights is that it comes at the expense of hard-won rights for women. There are very bigoted versions of this argument which basically accuse trans women of being predatory sexual deviants intent on "appropriating" womanhood. However, the most effective—and most dangerous—versions of these arguments are made by liberal-sounding women like Kathleen Stock, a mild-mannered academic who is herself a lesbian.

Against people like Stock, it does not work to simply shout them down and accuse them of being anti-trans bigots. Rather, to defeat the feminist argument against trans rights it is necessary to understand what lies behind the conflict. What pushed women like Stock or J.K. Rowling to enter the debate on the trans question, and more importantly, what has made their interventions popular among many? The simple answer is that they lean on women's oppression. They use the fact that women are subject to violence, have less economic opportunities and are beset by all kinds of sexual prejudice to present trans women as competitors for women's rights.

In its brochure "Beyond Binaries" (July 2024) the Socialist Workers Party (in Britain) dismisses out of hand the argument made by TERFs, writing that "the right—and some socialists and feminists who gave them left cover—have based opposition to GRA [Gender Recognition Act] reform ***on the lie*** that trans women are a threat to women's rights" (our emphasis). Let's be clear: ***It is false to counterpose the cause of women and that of trans people***. That said, to simply dismiss the question as a lie is not a serious or effective argument. The truth is that viewed solely through the prism of society as it is ***currently organized***, where everyone is competing for a limited and shrinking pool of resources, there ***is*** a certain tension between improving conditions for trans people and improving those for women.

Grover/Shutterstock

Oxford, Britain: Demonstration against TERF professor Kathleen Stock, May 2023.

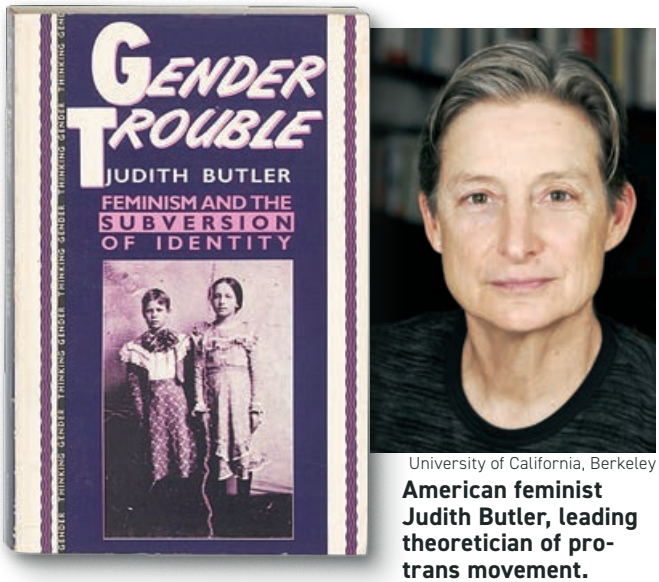
We will address the question of how to overcome these tensions later in the article. But first we must insist on the importance of recognizing the reality of this conflict of interest. Whether it is the question of sports, awards, shelters, prisons, bathrooms or affirmative action programs, the problem of limited economic resources is everywhere. Often the most controversial issues—like the question of trans women in elite sports—are not the ones that touch most people in their everyday lives. That said, these are important symbolic issues that are concentrated expressions of real, underlying tensions.

At bottom, the problem is that trans-inclusivity not only puts an extra strain on resources that are already limited for cis (non-trans) women but also challenges the rigid gender segregation through which society is organized. While this division is ultimately the reason for women's oppression, gender-segregated spaces and social programs are seen by most women as important rights offering a degree of protection in a patriarchal and often violent society. The road forward for trans integration and inclusivity lies in providing answers to the various conflicts and tensions that will lead to increased benefits for ***both*** trans people in general and cis women. Such answers will never be found by denying or minimizing the conflict of interest or by arguing that bigotry is the ***only factor*** pushing progressively-minded women in an anti-trans direction.

von Biberstein/Getty

Lia Thomas's victory at 2022 collegiate U.S. swimming championship provoked huge backlash against trans women in sports.

Part of the problem is that both TERFs and LGBTQ+ activists view the



University of California, Berkeley

American feminist Judith Butler, leading theoretician of pro-trans movement.

world through a feminist lens. Of course, there is a clear difference between the reactionary role played by TERFs in actively working to restrict the rights of trans people and LGBTQ+ activists who want to improve conditions for one of society's most oppressed groups. It is, after all, no coincidence that more and more there is a merging of TERFs and far-right political currents. That said, in their feminist worldview both TERFs and the mainstream of the LGBTQ+ movement approach the problem of women and sexual oppression in terms that are focused both on identity and on what is possible according to current social and economic norms.

For example, TERFs place a huge importance on who does or doesn't belong to the category of "woman." This is because "womanhood" is the defining lens through which they view all social relations. Being a woman or not determines whether one is an oppressor or not, whether one is allowed to attend women-only meetings, and whether one has benefited or not from "male privilege." Not only does such an understanding of the world do very little to advance the condition of women, but its divisive logic leads to ever-increasing fragmentation and conflict between various oppressed groups—starting with the feminists themselves.

As for the mainstream LGBTQ+ movement, its focus has been on lobbying corporations and institutions to change the language they use so that it will be inclusive of an ever-growing array of identities. This insistence derives from the feminist notion that language and ideas rather than materially rooted social institutions are the source of oppression. This type of activism leads to little if any positive changes in the lives of trans people but does the maximum in provoking a social backlash. The classic example is J.K. Rowling deriding the use of the phrase "people who menstruate."

When it comes to concrete policy decisions, both sides of the debate generally view the question only through the lens of what is possible within the political mainstream. Without understanding that capitalism itself is taking resources away from all oppressed groups, feminists, whether trans-inclusive or not, as a rule propose policies that would come at the expense of the material interests or sensibilities of another oppressed group. For example, including trans women in the female carceral system without changing anything else in the barbaric way people are imprisoned is bound to create tensions and socially explosive incidents. Again, without understanding the tension brought about by limited resources and existing social relations, it is impossible to offer solutions that can lead to overcoming or at least minimizing conflicts between oppressed groups.

The Problem with Liberal Idealism

We have already touched on some of the problems with mainstream pro-trans ideology as it pertains to biology and feminism. Both relate to a broader underlying issue: the movement has an idealist ideological foundation. By "idealist" we mean a philosophical worldview that does not see oppression as fundamentally derived from economic relations but from wrong conceptions floating around in people's heads.

Judith Butler is a leading academic in the world of gender studies and has had a huge influence in laying the ideological underpinnings of the modern LGBTQ+ movement. According to Butler:

> "The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally, often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination.… The urgency of feminism to establish a universal status for patriarchy in order to strengthen the appearance of feminism's own claims to be representative has occasionally motivated the short-cut to a categorial or fictive universality of the structure of domination, held to produce women's common subjugated experience."
>
> —*Gender Trouble* (Routledge, 1990)

Behind the jargon, Butler rejects that "patriarchy," i.e., women's oppression, is rooted in any single social institution. That is, Butler denies that the patriarchal family is the institution that enshrines and reproduces the gendered division of society. As a result, Butler does not seek to fight gender oppression through creating ***social conditions*** that

Frédéric Ducarme

There is no gender here.

Let Trans Kids Decide!

We reprint below an article from Workers Hammer *(No. 252, Spring 2024).*

The publication of Dr Hilary Cass's review on gender identity services in the NHS has unleashed a torrent of anti-trans reaction. Anti-trans campaigners present the report as a vindication of their views. However, its most significant impact is that it has given the green light to centrists and wavering liberals to dump the trans cause. The Labour Party leadership has hailed it, with Wes Streeting (shadow secretary for health) repudiating his comments last year that "trans women are women". The BBC now invites anti-trans activists as serious "experts". Even Stonewall was largely positive about it. Written by an authoritative NHS doctor and couched in "science", compassion and even pro-trans rhetoric, the Cass review has enabled those who had previously tepidly defended trans people and were looking for a way out to do so with a "scientific" and "respectable" cover.

The review's recommendations are devastating for trans kids. Hormones and puberty blockers (which have been in use for decades) would now be treated as dangerous drugs to be withheld. Those between 17 and 25 would not be treated by adult services. More barriers to the already restrictive transitioning process would be implemented. While the report describes real failures by the NHS, the "scandal" being whipped up is that too many young people were allowed to transition. Indeed, the whole premise behind the report's "holistic" approach is that most youth who want to change gender are mentally ill. The implication is that giving them what they want to transition must be avoided, and they must instead receive mental health treatment. Gays, too, used to be seen as sick people who needed empathy and therapy. The Cass review treats trans people the same way.

With most liberals embracing this anti-trans review, the pro-trans milieu has been on the defensive. Many have tried to counter the report with facts and methodology. The Cass review is littered with methodological mistakes and ignores many studies that debunk its conclusions. But you can't wage an effective fightback on this basis. What is needed is to attack the pillar of the anti-trans crusade and of the Cass report, which is the idea that teenagers are too stupid to make decisions about their own lives and that it is the state, the NHS and parents which must dictate what they can and cannot do—in the name of "protecting" them! The problem is that most pro-trans activists agree or concede to this in one way or another, which only ties their hands. The response to the Cass report must be the simple yet controversial statement: ***let trans kids decide!***

The whole weight of this rotten system is felt on youth's shoulders like a ton of bricks. Kids' rebellious spirit and creativity are crushed at school and at home so that they be obedient robots with no future. "Responsible" adults (most of whom can't get their own lives together) are the ones ordering them on how they should live their lives: "You can't vape, you can't drink, you can't dress as you want, you can't do this or that; sex is a dangerous and monstrous thing, and if you question your gender, we'll send you to a shrink because you are sick." ***This*** is what destroys young people. ***This*** is what traumatises them and pushes them to suicide. Yes, kids must be helped. They must be informed. ***But for god's sake, leave the kids alone! Let them choose!*** ■

can replace the family as an institution but through challenging and subverting existing ***social norms***:

> "As a strategy to denaturalize and resignify bodily categories, I describe and propose a set of parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts that disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame."

While transgressing gender norms can be a liberating prospect for those who reject their gender and/or the social expectations that come with it, such actions do absolutely nothing to challenge how society as a whole is organized.

The division of society into two genders is a social fact, which is just as real as the biological division between sexes. It is not the product of ***ideas*** but of a historically evolved ***institution*** maintained by material constraints and bourgeois class interests. This is not to say that patriarchal relations must be permanent. But to break down gender norms, it is ultimately necessary to transform ***society***, not one's ***identity***.

One can hate capitalism and go live in a commune in the forest, but that does not change the fact that capitalism will continue to exist. In the same way, one can identify as nonbinary, gender non-conforming or anything else, but this will not change the fact that society (outside of very isolated petty-bourgeois circles) will continue to place individuals in a gender binary. Individuals who on a personal basis reject such norms marginalize themselves from society; they do not change it.

Pro-Trans "Marxists"

Marxism as a revolutionary doctrine was developed in the 19th century in direct opposition to what was called at the time "utopian socialism." Utopian socialists came up with various schemes to transcend capitalism by changing collective consciousness or by devising ideal micro societies. In contrast, the doctrine of scientific socialism elaborated by Marx and Engels identified the forces and dynamics within capitalism that have the potential to overthrow the existing class structure and lay the basis to evolve toward an egalitarian society. The motor force for this revolution was not a set of ideals but the interests of a class, the proletariat.

To Hell with the Sports Ban!

Trump's ban on trans women participating in women's sports is a major blow to transgender rights in the U.S. How it will be applied remains to be seen, but it promises to cut federal funding to all educational institutions which allow trans women to compete as women. Many American states and sports bodies had already taken similar measures, and these precedents are sure to be repeated internationally.

However, the response to Trump's executive order has been pathetic, with very few people ready to take a stand against it. The reality is that the trans movement has totally lost the debate on the question of trans sports, and there is strong popular support for Trump's ban. The right has successfully used this question as a wedge to push a broader reactionary agenda. Conversely, the working class must defend trans people as part of defending ***its own interests***. This requires exposing the bigoted and anti-scientific arguments of the reactionaries. But we must also have a frank look at the arguments of the trans movement which have so far proved ineffective in countering the reactionary offensive.

Children, Teens and Hormones

Given that childhood and adolescence are the ages at which participation in sports is the highest, trans kids will be the group most affected. Trans kids are already growing up in an extremely hostile environment, and the ban will further stigmatize and exclude them. For prepubescent children, this policy cannot in any way be justified by a difference in physical abilities between boys and girls because there are ***barely any***. The attack on kids is the weakest part of the anti-trans argument, but also the most socially damaging. We must strongly push back and insist: ***let trans kids compete in the gender of their choice!***

Things start getting more complicated with the onset of puberty where physical performances start to diverge between the sexes. But a big part of the problem would be mitigated if trans kids were allowed to take puberty blockers. The conclusion is simple. ***Lift the ban on puberty blockers!*** When it comes to excluding trans women who have not gone through male puberty, this is simply bigotry. ***Let them compete too!***

While average physical performances between men and women diverge after puberty across a range of metrics, there is still a high degree of overlap. Women whose performance is above average will outperform a large proportion of men. This means that it is not inherently unsafe for women and men to compete against each other. In recreational and lower-level competitive sports, where stakes are lower and performances are average, it should generally be possible to include trans women—even those who have gone through male puberty—with minimal social conflict. This is particularly true for trans athletes undertaking hormone therapy which has a huge impact on performance.

On this last point, there is a huge amount of ignorance, and the effects of hormones are often minimized. A study of U.S. Airmen—one of the rare places where a large sample of high-performing trans people can be found—showed that after two years of hormone therapy, trans women on average did the same number of push-ups and sit-ups as cis women. As for distance running, trans women retained only a small edge. Interestingly the study showed that trans men could on average do more sit-ups than cis men. This goes to show that when we are talking about ***average physical performances***, hormone therapy does a lot to balance the scales. Trump's ban sweeps all these nuances under the rug and bans everyone, ***to hell with it!***

Sports, Money and Women

But here we come to the biggest problem: high-level competitive sports are not about ***averages*** but about ***extremes***. Athletes dedicate their lives to pushing the limits of the human body, and slight margins make big differences, both

To any Marxist this is all ABC. Accordingly, many Marxists criticize postmodern gender theory for being idealist. However, those who are pro-trans do so half-heartedly while peddling the very illusions they claim to stand against. In an effort to not "alienate themselves" from the movement, they liquidate the Marxist program into run-of-the-mill liberal idealism. Not only does this disorient radical fighters for transgender rights, but it also makes it easy for reactionaries to attack the movement as entirely a product of idealism.

A clear example of this conciliation can be seen in the SWP pamphlet referred to above:

> "We can understand gender as having two broad elements. Firstly, gender is external to a person. This is based on perceived gender roles given to us by society, from how we act, dress and behave and speak. Secondly, it's also an internal sense of our self, or our gender identity. It is deeply felt within individuals, and people should be able to express that however they choose."

Here the SWP confuses everything. On the one hand they present gender as having a social character, although one which is loosely defined. At the same time, they present gender as a personal "sense of self" open to a totally idealist and even religious interpretation. And finally, they voice the wish that people should be able to express their desires however they want.

At bottom, the SWP definition obfuscates the fact that gender is a product of social relations, not of one's own mind. It is only when the internal desire to change gender interacts with other humans that it can be realized in fact. Moreover, one's ***will*** to identify a certain way ***in no way means*** that one will be ***socially accepted*** as such. This is the

Millis/Reuters

Trump signing sinister executive order banning trans women and girls from participating in female sports.

competitively and economically. Whether you come first or second in a race can determine your entire career. Generally, pro-trans activists argue there is no proof of an unfair advantage for trans women and that any potential advantage they may have is secondary to the social benefits of trans inclusion. These arguments are not convincing and are fundamentally counterproductive.

The physical attributes which give an edge vary a lot according to the sport. But if we take height for example, it is undeniable that in many sports it can make a big difference. If we look simply at averages, the differences between men and women are not too dramatic. A woman who is above average in height will be taller than many men. But if we look at extremes, which is generally what we are talking about in elite competitive sports, then the problems become obvious.

Lia Thomas, whose victory at the NCAA swimming national championship caused a huge scandal, measures 6 feet 1. Looking at the 2007-8 U.S. census numbers, 11 percent of men aged 20-29 were taller than 6 feet 1, whereas among women it was 0 percent, which is statistically insignificant. So, while Thomas before transitioning was in the high range for men, after transition she was in the ***very extreme*** range for women. Is this why she won? Maybe, maybe not. The fact is that her victory provoked a huge backlash. Responding to this by saying she had no advantage when one can visibly see that she is far taller than any of the other women was considered by most people to be ridiculous. The point is simply that we should not dismiss concerns about unfair advantages.

Women face a huge uphill battle in the world of competitive sports. While cases like that of Thomas represent a minuscule minority, they are a lightning rod for broader frustrations. To respond to these concerns by stating that the emancipation of trans athletes overrides potential unfairness just throws oil on the fire and presents pro-trans advocates as being totally insensitive to the rights of women.

What To Do?

To wage a political campaign against sports bans, the basic approach must be to ***focus on sports for kids and teens*** which is the most impactful on the lives of trans people, while seeking to ***minimize high-profile conflicts*** in elite sporting. This does not mean conceding that trans athletes should be banned from elite sports, but simply that this should not be the focus of the fightback, and that when it is pushed it should be based on a tailored approach to a given sport, based on science and taking into account the sensibilities of women. As a rule, the inclusion of trans athletes should go hand in hand with fighting for ***more resources*** for the working class and women to participate in sports.

While we should fight for maximum trans inclusion and more resources for the working class and women, the reality is that sports under capitalism will always be unfair. The whole organization of sports based on rigid gender segregation clashes with the complexities of the real world where everything does not fit in a neat box. This problem was on full display during the Paris Olympics where Algerian boxer Imane Khelif faced disgusting charges that she was not a "real woman." Ultimately, fair and emancipatory sports, where gender, race, nationality and financial resources do not limit one's potential, requires a different kind of society. This is why the cause of trans athletes cannot be seen in isolation but must be informed by and linked to a broader revolutionary Marxist perspective.■

basis for trans oppression. On the face of it this is obvious, and trans people more than anyone know this to be true. There is a huge difference between a "passing" trans person on one side and a "non-passing" trans person or nonbinary person on the other.

For the SWP and pro-LGBTQ+ liberals, defining gender only as a product of social relations would probably be considered offensive and a capitulation to anti-trans discourse. But it is an undeniable fact that capitalism will not allow most trans people to socially integrate into the gender of their choice. And it will ***never*** make it socially acceptable to be outside of the gender binary. Recognizing this is not a capitulation to the right. It is a recognition of what we are up against. To posit that one's "internal sense of our self" automatically leads to a different social reality is not to be a good ally—it is to lead transgender people down the garden path, exactly what has been done for decades by the liberals.

The LGBTQ+ movement's answer to trans oppression has been to insist that individuals should "affirm" gender. While this is certainly the socially conscious thing to do, not least for communists, it is utterly deluded to think that "social affirmation" itself can break down the rigid gender norms of society. In fact, gender affirmation has never left the narrow limits of the liberal intelligentsia and LGBTQ+ subculture—a fact patently clear today.

However, there is zero recognition of this among Marxists who write on the trans question. This is obvious in the "Ten Theses on the Gender Question—Revisited," where comrade Roxy Hall writes that:

> "While trans identity is not itself revolutionary—the weapon of critique will never replace the critique by weapons—we should encourage everyone to rebel in their own ways against

> the gender hierarchies that are thrust upon us. Would it not be beneficial to have all kinds of people resisting gender norms, breaking the symbolic link between sex characteristics and gender roles, living in bold and unconventional ways? Surely the process of abolishing gender will at first present as an explosion of different modes of living."
>
> —thepartyist.com, 2 June 2024

No, "living in bold and unconventional ways" will not in any way help to ***abolish gender***. In fact, it is quite the opposite. In changing one's "mode of living," one confronts the conservative ideas of society without doing anything to change its structure. In the context where the living conditions of the working class are under constant attack and where it finds itself more and more reliant on the family structure, pushing against social norms as a ***political strategy*** will only result in a conservative backlash. Rather than "living in bold and unconventional ways," what is necessary is to show concretely how the ***material interests*** of the working class are advanced by defending transgender ***social and political rights***.

Another expression of the idealist concessions made by Marxists writing on the trans question is the near-unanimous embrace of the notion that genders are "assigned at birth." Both the SWP and Roxy Hall repeat this idealist myth. This concept once again downplays the fact that gender relations are an objective social fact, not a misguided notion or an arbitrary tag allotted to babies. The gender one has at birth is no less arbitrary than one's race, nationality or class. While each of these examples is very different, they are all the product of the objective social relations one ***is born into***. This does not mean that any of these categories are fixed for life. But it does mean that changing them is a social process, which is generally very difficult.

Most Marxist and LGBTQ+ advocates hit the roof when right-wingers compare changing one's gender with changing one's race. The classic example is that of Rachel Doležal, a woman born white who identified as black and held a leadership position in the NAACP. Liberals react in horror at the idea that one could choose and succeed in becoming black in America and come up with all kinds of convoluted reasons why changing one's race, unlike gender transition, is morally reprehensible. This reaction belies a moralistic approach to racial oppression—just like changing one's gender, there is nothing inherently wrong with changing one's race. But this reaction also reflects an idealist view of gender, which we are led to believe is, unlike other social divisions, uniquely subject to individual will.

Abhinav Anguria

Gender nonconforming artist Alok Vaid-Menon. People should do what they want, but that's not how genders will be abolished.

Again and again, we find a similar pattern. The trans movement is under attack from right-wingers, bigots and feminists. These attacks reassert the rigid and impermeable social laws that regiment gender relations. The pro-trans movement reacts to these attacks by seeking to defend the right and possibility for individuals to change genders. But in waging this righteous struggle, they lean on idealist gender theories that simply fuel the backlash and reinforce the isolation of trans people.

To this they add a strong dose of liberal moralism: you must be kind, tolerant, enlightened, conscious of your privileges, etc., etc. This strategy had a certain success when it was echoed by the most powerful bourgeoisie in the world. But now that the U.S. has sharply turned against liberalism, with Amazon, Facebook and J.P. Morgan ditching their diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs and woke capitalism, the trans movement finds itself holding the bag and facing the hostility of all those sick of being subjected to empty preaching as their lives get worse.

The reason Marxists need to expose the falseness of the LGBTQ+ movement's idealist conceptions is that they make it utterly impossible to organize a real fightback in defense of trans people, and every other category of sexually non-conforming individuals. The trans movement cannot afford to cling to the myths and illusions that led it into the exposed and vulnerable position it finds itself in. More than ever, it is crucial that it adopt a revolutionary and materialist program for trans liberation.

Part Three: A Marxist Program to Fight Reaction

In his 1909 article "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion" (see excerpt page 13), Lenin makes the following argument:

> "No educational book can eradicate religion from the minds of masses who are crushed by capitalist hard labour, and who are at the mercy of the blind destructive forces of capitalism, until those masses themselves learn to fight this ***root*** of religion, fight ***the rule of capital*** in all its forms, in a united, organised, planned and conscious way.
>
> "Does this mean that educational books against religion are harmful or unnecessary? No, nothing of the kind. It means that Social-Democracy's atheist propaganda must be ***subordinated*** to its basic task—the development of the class struggle of the exploited ***masses*** against the exploiters."

This basic approach can be fully applied to questions relating to trans oppression. It is essential for Marxists to argue against backward conceptions in the working class regarding gender relations, not least women's oppression. But this work must be informed and guided by the class struggle.

In other words, we as Marxists want the dividing political line in society to be between workers and capitalists, not between pro-trans positions and anti-trans positions, between woke liberals and backward conservatives. This does ***not*** mean burying the issue and adapting to backward prejudices but rather ***bringing the transgender issue to the fore as a necessity for the pursuit of workers' own emancipation***. To apply this method and develop a program toward trans liberation is no easy task, not least in a period where the trans question has become such a wedge issue. This must be done concretely for every country and workplace, but as general building blocks for such a program we propose the following key points:

1) Ditch the Liberals

We must draw lessons from the disastrous course that led trans people to the position they find themselves in today. The clearest and most obvious lesson is that the liberals are an absolutely unreliable ally that cannot in any way be counted on. Democrats, British Labour Party, Green Parties, Die Linke: they have all shown that when the pressure gets high, they leave the oppressed high and dry. It is suicidal to expect that liberals can be pressured into being real champions of LGBTQ+ rights. Their establishment careers and capitalist appetites always come before their so-called values.

Valcic/SOPA Images

Ditch the liberals: Labour Party leaders Keir Starmer, Angela Rayner and Sadiq Khan at 2022 London Pride parade.

Trans people need a revolutionary program for liberation, not symbolic alterations to colors on a flag.

This does not mean that we must never form any kind of defensive bloc or engage in joint actions with liberals. In a period of right-wing offensives and attacks against democratic rights, such alliances may very well be called for. But they must be entered into with the understanding that liberals are spineless and treacherous. Ultimately, the purpose of such an alliance must be to break rank-and-file activists from liberalism by showing the correctness of the Marxist strategy. It must ***not*** be to liquidate the Marxist program in order to pacify the liberals, which is what pro-trans Marxists have done again and again.

2) Drop Empty Symbolism

Trans liberation is a ***material act***. Its progress can be measured by the degree to which it is possible for individuals to change their gender and the degree to which gender divisions exist at all in society. Ideas and consciousness will change in direct proportion to the changes in ***social relations*** and ***institutions***. They will not change through a woke ideological campaign berating people for what they think or how they talk. We must of course educate people and strongly oppose bigotry—including willful misgendering. But this cannot be the sole or main focus of the struggle. Instead of targeting language and symbols, the struggle must focus on defending the ***material conditions*** and ***rights*** of trans people against the current reactionary onslaught.

3) No Concessions to Bourgeois Morality

It is no coincidence that the backlash against trans people has focused so heavily on the question of trans kids. According to traditional morality, children are asexual beings who have no ability to make choices about their own lives and bodies. As such, there has been a hysterical campaign against puberty blockers and any sort of gender-affirming care for those legally declared underage. As a result of this campaign, trans people have been smeared as sexual degenerates and groomers while their supporters in the medical field have been accused of child abuse, malpractice and even committing "mutilation."

In response to such disgusting and vociferous attacks, there is strong pressure to conform as much as possible to traditional sexual norms and values. For example, many people claiming to be pro-trans concede that children should not be given any ability to transition before legal majority. This is a total dead end. Not only will such concessions do nothing to tamp down the backlash, but they also open the door to further rollbacks of trans rights.

Concessions to bourgeois morality put the LGBTQ+ movement on a slippery slope. For it to concede in any way that individuals should not have the right to make decisions about their own bodies and sexuality is to cut the ground out from under the movement's feet. It cedes the power to decide to the family, the state and religion—the very institutions responsible for the oppression of children, women and trans people.

4) Look to Oppressed Religious Minorities

Oppressed minorities, in particular Muslims in the West, are not the first place most trans activists would look to find allies. While practicing Muslims can often be very conservative on questions of sexuality, they are also one of the most oppressed and victimized groups in many countries. Muslims just like trans people find themselves more and more isolated and targeted by the state. Unlike liberals who are busy trying to integrate into the new socially conservative status quo, Muslims are largely being barred from that possibility.

There is an objective basis for an alliance based on a defense of basic democratic rights. However, such alliances are only possible if the content in people's heads is given a backseat to the common interests of both groups. In turn, engaging in joint struggle would go a long way toward changing mentalities on both sides.

5) Forge Unity Between Trans and Women's Liberation

There has been no conflict more damaging to the trans struggle than that with the feminists. This is in part due to the conservative and sectoralist views of many women. But it also has to do with the way the trans issue has been pushed by the mainstream LGBTQ+ movement. In wanting to break down the rigid barrier between genders, the movement has often trodden on women's sensibilities. For example, it is stupid to argue that associating female anatomy and menstruation with women is inherently exclusionary of trans men. After millennia of their oppression being linked to their bodies, it is understandable that many women react negatively to being told that this connection can no longer be made.

Moreover, thinking that trans people can be integrated into single-sex spaces for women without causing serious social tensions is to disregard how deeply rooted gender segregation and oppression are in society. There can be no perfect solution to this problem under capitalism. Strict gender segregation based on biological sex is no solution at all. It is not only totally impractical but dangerous and oppressive to trans people. Trans people ***should be*** allowed access to the gender facilities of their choice. But there should also be provisions made to accommodate conservative opinions and minimize the clash of values.

The solutions generally lie in ***increasing resources*** in a way that will benefit both trans people and women in general. An obvious solution to the conflict over trans women having access to women's shelters is to ***build more***, allow trans women to access them and also offer the options of strict biological segregation for women who so desire.

Gallup/Getty

Berlin, May 2021: Brutal repression of pro-Palestine protesters. Muslims can be allies of trans struggle.

While at the moment the defense of womanhood is the main stick used to beat trans people, the current reactionary backlash is also directed against women. The conditions of women, LGBTQ+ people and workers are ultimately inseparable from each other. All have an interest in uniting in common defensive struggle and more broadly to fight for ***women's***, ***trans***, and ***working-class liberation***.

6) The Working Class Is the Decisive Force

The working class is the only class that can decisively defend trans rights. This is not because it is the most liberal-minded sector of society—it is not—but because it has a direct class interest in overthrowing capitalism and establishing a classless society which will have no need for gender oppression.

The basis for a trans and working-class alliance is not trans people abandoning the fight against their own oppression. Trans oppression—just like the oppression of gays, lesbians, women and racial minorities—divides and weakens the working class. Only through fighting for the liberation of every oppressed group in society can unity be forged. This is not liberal "kumbaya." The glue that can bind these struggles together is the ***class struggle***.

This is not an automatic process; the various causes must be fused consciously. But the class struggle, through its own laws and dynamics, provides the arena for this process to take place. Joint struggle for a common interest is the precondition to overcoming social backwardness. For such struggles to take place, we must not place preconditions. For example,

it would be utterly reactionary to abstain from a strike because workers express backward views on the trans question. Rather, it must be shown through the course of the conflict that trans rights are connected to those of workers. Doing so will help change backward views.

We must keep in mind that the trans movement is not a unified movement. While all trans people are oppressed, they do not all share a common interest. Because of this, it is essential that trans activists always put the interests of the working class ***above all else***. They must, for example, stay away from looking to corporate DEI policies as a means of defending their rights.

The trans movement should as much as possible seek to combine its own struggle with that of the working class. An obvious way to do this is the fight for healthcare, which is a burning issue all around the world. The crisis in healthcare goes hand in hand with the attacks against gender-affirming care, as well as reproductive rights. It goes without saying that fighting for better healthcare will benefit trans people. But making trans care a central issue of the fight for healthcare can also galvanize the cause by bringing thousands of trans people and their families into the broader movement.

Colin Clews/gayinthe80s.com

Lesbian and gay activists march together with miners at London Pride demo, 1985. Trans movement should ally with the working class to fight for liberation of all.

7) Forget Gradualism

The gradual reform of capitalism was always a dead end for trans people and every other sexually oppressed group. No matter how much temporary progress can be achieved in eroding strict gender norms, this inevitably runs up against the foundations of capitalist rule: the family, the state and the profit motive. The period of relative progress for LGBTQ+ people in the Western world is now over, and the only prospect for the foreseeable future is increased social conservatism. Gradual reform is a fruitless prospect. Only revolutionary struggle offers a road to fight against increased oppression and march toward ultimate liberation.

8) Build a Revolutionary International Party

The struggle for trans liberation has mostly been focused in the Western world in the past years. However, trans liberation and the broader fight against gender oppression is an ***international struggle***. Nowhere is this oppression more severe than in the countries oppressed by imperialism. And nowhere is there a more potent revolutionary soil than among the working-class women of these countries.

To make the connection between the trans movement in the West and the international struggle against imperialist oppression requires an ***international revolutionary party***. Only with such a vehicle can the struggle against forms of oppression be fused. To build such a party, we must draw the ***political lessons of past failures***, understand how the liberalism of the past decades has not only led the trans movement astray but also led the revolutionary left to be more splintered and weaker than ever. With the world becoming more reactionary every day, we have no time to waste in esoteric debates and sectarian hair-splitting: ***Forward to a reforged Fourth International!***

* * *

There is no doubt this article only begins to approach from a Marxist point of view the various scientific questions, social complexities and political tasks facing the transgender movement. There is much more to be done. However, we hope that our contribution can provoke a wider debate and political clarification among the radical left and LGBTQ+ movement. ■

Chowdhury/Getty

Dhaka, Bangladesh: Mass uprising brought down hated Hasina regime, August 2024, posing need for workers power.

Britain

The Crisis in Healthcare and Women's Oppression

This article was originally printed in Workers Hammer *(No. 249, Spring 2023), newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain.*

The National Health Service (NHS) has been gutted and bled dry. The entire system is collapsing and access to even the most basic care is on the line. For the working class in Britain, this is literally a life-and-death question. The strikes by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), Unite and other NHS unions are certainly about wages, but also much more. The very survival of a publicly funded healthcare service is at stake.

Workers Hammer

Striking nurses at University College London Hospital, 18 January 2023.

This reality is widely recognised. The question is: ***what to do?*** Every single politician swears up and down that they are entirely committed to "saving the NHS". To count on them is to count on an arsonist to put out a fire. The Tories have ground the NHS down and are now slamming the door on nurses' modest wage demands. As for Labour, Starmer promises to go back to the legacy of…Tony Blair, the very man who opened the doors wide for the private sector in healthcare. The Scottish National Party, Lib Dems and Greens offer nothing better. Clearly the politicians don't have the answer.

Social progress comes from one place in this reactionary kingdom: the struggles of the working class. Clearly the unions are central to "saving the NHS". On the other hand, for 40 years the unions have utterly failed to put a stop to the destruction of the NHS and the erosion of living standards. The fault lies not with the unions themselves but with the disastrous course followed by the union leadership. Instead of building unions as tools of struggle which can defend the basic needs of workers, unions in this country have been hollowed out and are wielded as pathetic public relations tools.

This is apparent in the strategy currently being pursued by the RCN. After almost a century of opposing strikes, allowing its members to be worked to the bone and the state of the NHS to become disastrous, the RCN has called a few strike days. Their objective is to "force the government to stop and listen to what the health care workforce is asking for" (*RCN Magazine*, 16 October 2020). All well and good, but a few spread-out strike days will not "force" the government to do anything. In fact, while the government hasn't budged, the RCN cut its pay demands in half, from 19 to 10 per cent after only two strike days.

The government will not be made to "recognise" the true worth of NHS workers through media attention. What has happened to the NHS is not some misguided policy but a decades-long campaign to destroy the greatest working-class gain in this country. This will not be reversed without a real fight and certainly not by having illusions in goodwill from Westminster.

Every nurse knows that to treat a patient one must first have a correct diagnosis of the ailment. The RCN correctly identifies low wages as an important factor in the crisis of the NHS. However, low wages are only a symptom of a broader problem. The real cause of the NHS crisis is the general degradation of social and economic conditions in Britain and Northern Ireland. In the last 40 years working conditions, public services and the condition of women have all been ground down by constant attacks. Nothing expresses

this reality better than the collapsing NHS—a showcase of miserable working conditions, crumbling services and the brutal treatment of women in this country.

To save the NHS and reverse the general decline in living standards, it is necessary to broaden the struggle and get at the root of the crisis. Towards this *Workers Hammer* advocates that strikes in the NHS be organised around the struggle for: ***high wages, quality healthcare, women's liberation***. These questions cannot be divided into separate boxes but will either go forward or fall back together. To advance, they must all be fought for ***together*** by the ***entire*** working class. But none of the NHS unions are pursuing such a strategy, focusing instead on narrow demands divorced from the broader social questions at stake. The question of women's oppression in particular is ignored or given token mention. ***This will not do.*** Yes, it is bread we fight for, but we must fight for roses too.

Women as Workers

What does women's liberation have to do with the crisis in the NHS? Everything in fact. The question of women's oppression is intertwined with every aspect of the NHS. First and most obviously, it relates to the status of women as workers. The NHS workforce is overwhelmingly female, and the NHS is by far the largest employer of women in Britain. It is no coincidence that NHS employees make generally much less than those in male-dominated jobs of similar qualification.

A large reason behind this pay gap is that the government exploits the social conditioning of women as "caregivers" to demand greater sacrifices than in male-dominated professions. In the name of "saving lives" and "caring for patients", nurses and other NHS staff are asked to put their own well-being aside. This moral blackmail was ramped up to an extreme during the pandemic. Now, the same method is being used to try to discredit and demoralise the strikes. Nurses and ambulance workers are accused of killing people by striking for better working conditions. This demagogy must be decisively rejected if any progress is to be made in the NHS.

Far from doing this during the pandemic, the NHS unions totally submitted to the government's blackmail, giving it free rein to press workers to the breaking point. In return they received nothing but clapping. In the current strike, the RCN has had to oppose some of the very arguments it peddled during the pandemic. It has argued that the nurses strikes are necessary to save the NHS and that it is the crumbling system which is killing working people. This is entirely correct. Why then is the struggle so minimal and halfhearted?

Government blackmailed population into accepting reactionary lockdowns, criminally supported by trade-union leaders. Unions should have called the shots, not the government.

Clearly the NHS unions are still on the back foot, conciliating the argument that it is morally wrong for them to cause disruption. It is time to go on the offensive. The selflessness and social consciousness so strong among NHS workers—and women in particular—need to be unleashed in the fight for better healthcare and wages for all. The bottom line is that the NHS will collapse and many more working people will die if the working class as a whole doesn't take a stand. The more determined and decisive the struggle, the more support will be won from working people and the more healthcare will be improved.

Public Services and the Family

Women's oppression in the NHS goes deeper than inferior wages. Being an overwhelmingly female workforce means that most NHS workers face a second shift at home of childcare, housework and care for the elderly. These tasks fall disproportionately on women, making the question of public services all the more important for them. The provision of free healthcare, public education, care homes—these are all modest but very real steps towards taking "caring" out of the private sphere of the family and into the social sphere. Improving the quality and availability of public services directly alleviates the burden of domestic work on women. Conversely, cuts to public services and the absence of affordable childcare only increase the strain.

While the state of public services has a particular impact on working women, it profoundly impacts the well-being of working men as well. Far from dividing workers along sexual lines, making women's emancipation a centrepiece of the struggle for the NHS has the potential to unite the working class on a much stronger basis than simple economic demands. For example, workers in male-dominated sectors like rail will be much more likely to ally with nurses for better healthcare and reducing the burden of household chores than over wage demands.

Indeed, the condition of women directly relates to the general level of social progress. The early socialist Charles Fourier explained back in 1808 how:

> "***Social progress and changes of historical period are brought about as a result of the progress of women towards liberty; and the decline of social orders is brought about as a result of the diminution of the liberty of women***.
> "Other events influence these political vicissitudes, but there is no other cause which produces such rapid social progress or decline as a change in the condition of women."
> —*The theory of the four movements*

The struggle for the advancement of women is not only an entirely just cause but also a lever that can lift all of society. The fight for a quality NHS and better public services demonstrates this clearly.

Healthcare and Capitalism

In order to obtain quality healthcare for all, it is essential to understand what obstacles stand in the way. At bottom it is the very nature of the capitalist economy which drags

down and limits the quality of healthcare. When Britain was a manufacturing power, its ruling class had a certain interest in providing a rudimentary degree of education and healthcare. This was not out of charity but because of the pressure from a strong working class, as well as the need for an effective industrial workforce and able-bodied soldiers. As the economy was turned more and more towards purely speculative and parasitical activities in finance and high-end services and the working class was decimated, the need to maintain semi-decent healthcare and educational standards for the mass of the population has receded.

Today more and more of the economy relies on a thin layer of highly trained technocrats and specialists. This has meant that education, healthcare and social housing for the general public have all become "wasteful" expenses in the eyes of the capitalists. These services simply do not contribute enough to "productivity" to warrant meaningful investment. As public services receive less funding and the general welfare of the population is degraded, the strain on the public healthcare system becomes untenable. This is the reason for the NHS crisis. It is caused not by a heartless "ideology" or "greed" but by the fundamental interests of the ruling class. This understanding has to be at the centre of the struggle for better healthcare and better working conditions.

Lesson of the Pandemic: NHS Workers Should Call the Shots

Looking back at the pandemic through this lens leads to clear conclusions. It was ***criminal*** for the entire labour movement—the Labour Party, unions and left—to support the every worker—especially but not only in the NHS—that what happened to her can happen to anyone.

Why We Defend Lucy Letby

SWNS

Lucy Letby, scapegoat for collapse of NHS.

The following article was originally printed in Workers Hammer *(No. 255, Winter 2025), newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain.*

To anyone trying to understand the Letby case, the sheer volume of information, including complex medical arguments, can seem daunting. Actually, it's quite straightforward. Lucy Letby was scapegoated for the failings of care in the hospital where she worked. She was framed up in a show trial that turned a dedicated and professional nurse into a monster who we were led to believe was a killer of tiny infants. The National Health Service (NHS) bosses, whose entire system depends on taking advantage of the selflessness and dedication of women workers, had no qualms about pinning the blame for the system's failings on this young working-class woman.

To understand why the trade unions must take up her case, we must unpack the toxic mix of factors that led to this frame-up by the NHS bosses, the cops and courts. First of all, she worked in conditions that are typical of the collapsing NHS where patients are dying in corridors and staff are leaving in droves because they cannot do it anymore. The neonatal unit at the Countess of Chester Hospital where Lucy Letby worked treated very premature babies who by definition are high-risk. The number of baby deaths there spiked in 2015-16. The unit was short of such vital equipment as incubators and was woefully understaffed. Not to mention that, on occasion, sewage backed up into toilets and sinks. But the hospital authorities refused to tackle these problems. Rather than recruiting more nurses and doctors, or buying equipment, they looked for someone to blame. Some consultants branded Lucy Letby the "angel of death" on the grounds that she was on duty when many of the deaths occurred. The conviction of Lucy Letby is a warning to

Following a police investigation, Letby was put on trial on multiple murder charges. But to secure a conviction, the prosecution had a fundamental problem: there was ***no evidence*** of Lucy Letby—or anyone else—harming ***any*** child. To prove her guilt, the crucial question to be answered was, how exactly did the babies die?

The answer was provided by the leading expert witness for the prosecution, Dewi Evans, a paediatric consulting expert, who came up with a series of hypotheses that were pivotal to her conviction. He claimed that air was injected into babies' stomachs via nasogastric tubes causing an air embolism. Another of his hypotheses was insulin poisoning.

His theories have since been discredited and there is an avalanche of material available that exposes the trial as completely rigged. The Crown Prosecution Service has admitted that door-swipe data submitted as evidence that Letby was alone during some baby collapses was incorrect. Post-it notes saying things like "I am evil" were presented in court as if they were her confessions of guilt. In fact, she wrote them on

lockdowns. This meant leaving full control of health and working conditions in the hands of the demented Boris Johnson government, which obviously could not have cared less about protecting the working class in the pandemic.

Instead, what was needed was a determined struggle by the labour movement to take matters into its own hands. The working class should have fought for all social resources to be mobilised to respond to the emergency. New hospitals, care homes and other health facilities should have been built urgently. The housing stock should have been redistributed to ease overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions. NHS wages and staffing levels should have been doubled. These are only a few examples of basic measures which should and could have been taken to address the pandemic. They would also have had a beneficial long-term effect on the health of the population and the state of the healthcare system.

The obstacle to taking any of these measures is the fact that most resources are in the private hands of a small number of families. Requisitioning the assets of the capitalists (and royals) is obviously a big red line for a government whose entire purpose is to defend the interests of those very people. So instead, it shut everything down, pumped money into the pockets of Tory donors and squeezed NHS workers to the breaking point. The RCN and other NHS unions entirely bought into the national unity, "We're all in this together" propaganda, submitting to the government. Rather than fighting for improved social and working conditions, they begged for more lockdowns. The outcome of these policies is clear. It was a catastrophe during the pandemic and it pushed the NHS into the shambles it is today.

The lesson should be just as clear. Leaving healthcare in the hands of a capitalist government can only lead to disaster.

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the advice of her therapists to help her cope with the distress she was going through. The blood tests showing sky-high insulin levels in some babies have been shown to be invalid.

The testimony provided by Evans was vital to her conviction. However, far from an independent expert witness, he had helped the police to build a case against Letby. During the trial, her defence team tried to have him removed on the grounds that he was "dogmatic and biased" but the judge rejected the challenge.

By now, Evans's theory about air embolism as the cause of death has been ridiculed by medical experts as "implausible" and "not practically feasible". Amid growing public criticism, including in a Channel 5 documentary, Evans modified his account of the cause of death of three of the seven infants (babies C, I and P) that Letby was convicted of murdering. Having originally claimed that Baby C died of air being forced into the stomach via a nasogastric tube, Evans now claims that the probable cause of death was air being forced into the veins. He denies that his change of opinion is significant. In any case, he maintains that she's guilty.

Also, as of now, medical experts working with Letby's defence team have found evidence of the likely cause of death in two of the babies (so far) showing that the theories on which she was convicted are simply wrong. One of the babies probably died due to a blunder by one of the consultants, who intended to aspirate the baby's abdomen but perforated the liver. And the basis for the conviction continues to unravel.

How to Defend Lucy Letby?

Lucy Letby's barrister, Mark McDonald, has announced that he will refer her case to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, a body which examines potential miscarriages of justice. He will also try to take it back to the Court of Appeal. These legal avenues are to be welcomed, but we cannot rely on the courts. The legal review process takes forever. And history has shown that the British establishment will fight to the bitter end to uphold the honour of its "justice" system rather than admit that it locks up innocent people. The freeing of the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, innocent Irish people who were framed up by the cops for bombings, took years of tenacious legal battles as well as public campaigns.

As we saw in the Post Office scandal, it took years of struggle to expose the frame-up and even then, the authorities held out to the bitter end rather than admit the truth. It is worth noting that the Post Office got away with it for so long by silencing its critics, using fear of being sacked and even prosecuted, and sending people to prison to make examples of them. In a similar fashion, nurses in the NHS have been threatened with disciplinary action for speaking up in favour of Letby. One of her co-workers was warned not to provide a character statement in her defence for the trial.

The health service unions must take up the defence of Lucy Letby. When she was first targeted by some hospital consultants, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) represented her in a grievance procedure. Her grievance was upheld and consultants were forced to apologise to her. But since then, the RCN has kept a shameful silence while medical and other experts are working hard to expose her conviction as a travesty of justice. While she was RCN general secretary, Pat Cullen despicably rushed to publicly endorse the conviction of Letby. It is no surprise that Cullen would side with the establishment against Letby. On Cullen's watch, during the 2022-23 strike wave, the RCN bowed to the monarchy and refused to mount an effective struggle against the NHS bosses. The strikes ended in a demoralising defeat for the RCN which emboldened the NHS bosses to carry out further attacks on the health service.

There is an urgent need for trade unionists in the health service to defy their leaderships and build a campaign demanding justice for Lucy Letby. The union should galvanise the support for her that already exists. Nurses who worked with her knew her as a competent, caring and hard-working nurse who often worked extra shifts to cover for staff shortages. The NHS unions must push back hard against the notoriously bullying NHS bosses, who have intimidated nurses and doctors voicing support for Letby. The unions must take up the defence of Lucy Letby and build a public campaign for her freedom. She should not spend another day in prison for crimes that simply ***did not happen***.■

Call to protest
Free Lucy Letby!
17 March 2025 09:30
Liverpool Town Hall, High Street, L2 3SW

VAAP

International Institute of Social History

Left: Women's demonstration in Petrograd, 19 March 1917. Banner says: "As long as the woman is a slave, there can't be freedom—long live women's equality." Right: Soviet poster from 1920: "What the October Revolution gave to women workers and peasants." Woman points to library, cafeteria, workers' club, school for adults and "house for mother and child."

Healthcare workers should be in charge of running healthcare. A first basic step towards this would be for unions to push back against the ever-encroaching bureaucratic intrusions and fight for union control of health and safety. Ultimately the whole system should be run by workers from top to bottom.

The Road to Women's Liberation

The fundamental problem with the strategy pursued by the RCN and other NHS unions is that it does not start from the understanding that quality healthcare for all and capitalism are incompatible. Of course, unions must start from today's struggles and consciousness. But they must use the everyday battles to educate workers in the irreconcilable nature of the conflict. Far from doing this, the NHS unions peddle illusions that the capitalists and their government can be made to see the light and be reasonable. Such fairy tales undermine even the most minimal fights for better wages and working conditions. Instead of well-planned and determined struggles, they lead to half measures, compromise and capitulation.

Whether it is working conditions, public services or the status of women, it is crucial to understand that incremental and constant progress is impossible within capitalism. The NHS itself, while a crucial gain, was not a step towards socialism. It was part of the measures taken to shore up collapsing British imperialism after WWII. Attlee and arch-reactionary Churchill broadly agreed on such measures at the time. Since then, the NHS has been under constant attack. As the whole social fabric of the country is hollowed out by the ruling class, the only prospect for the future under capitalism is decline and misery.

In contrast, a workers government which would expropriate the capitalist class would be able to take immediate and long-term measures to increase the quantity and quality of public services. With productive forces used rationally and planned on an international level, more and more of the burden which today rests on the family can be taken on by society as a whole: cooking, cleaning, healthcare, education, child-rearing. As this progresses, the social role of the family will gradually wither away and with it the oppression of women.

Trade Unionism and Women's Oppression

The crisis in this country is crushing working people in every aspect of their lives. The ruling class is in perpetual crisis and social stability is rapidly eroding. The biggest hurdle to the liberation of the working class and the emancipation of women is certainly ***not*** the stability of the system. The road to socialism is blocked first and foremost by the absence of a working-class party that fights for socialism.

The current leadership of the workers movement is composed of the utterly pro-capitalist Labour Party and an occasionally militant-talking pro-capitalist union bureaucracy. To break the stranglehold of these traitors, it is necessary to show how their actions undermine the working class at every point and show that ***another road is possible***. This is the key task for socialists today. But far from doing this, the rest of the socialist left talks about Marxism and revolution only to then support various non-revolutionary leaderships of the working class.

This problem of leadership is highlighted very clearly in relation to the question of women's oppression and the NHS strikes. Take *Socialist Appeal* for example. They frequently write about women's oppression. They recently wrote about the disgusting cover-up of a serial police rapist by the Met. They also write articles about the need for socialism to emancipate women. But when it comes to the NHS strikes—which impact women in every way—***none*** of their articles ***so much as mention*** the question of women's oppression, much less advocate that the unions fight for women's liberation. The same could be said of any other socialist paper.

What explains this apparent contradiction? It comes from a disease identified by Lenin as economism. In Britain it is better known as trade unionism. At bottom this programme limits the aim of trade union struggle to improving the immediate economic conditions of the working class and preaches socialism for the future. When it comes to

Workers Hammer

19 September 2022: Spartacist League/ Britain organized only protest against monarchy in London on day of Queen Elizabeth's funeral, while union bureaucrats, tailed by fake socialists, bowed to Crown and canceled strikes.

addressing the oppression of other groups—women, ethnic minorities, immigrants, Travellers etc—economism limits itself to denouncing injustice and again…preaching socialism for the future.

This programme in all its iterations is entirely compatible with the current trade union bureaucracy, whether right-wing or left-wing. What is rejected is the struggle for a socialist leadership ***today*** which not only champions the cause of ***all*** the oppressed but aims to put an ***end*** to their oppression by overthrowing capitalism. Economism does not lead to gradual improvement but to betrayal by the pro-capitalist bureaucracy and obviously no progress at all towards socialism.

For the trade union bureaucracy and fake socialists, advocating women's liberation in the context of the NHS strikes would be "divisive" because some workers (and certainly the bureaucrats) think it is too radical. Fighting for black, Asian and immigrant liberation, which is also absolutely central in the NHS, would also for the same reason be considered "divisive". Similarly, it was to avoid "division" that when the Queen died, avowedly "republican" union leaders cancelled strikes and the RCN suspended its strike ballot. In fact, it is economism which divides the workers movement.

The ruling class constantly bombards the working class with all sorts of prejudices with the specific purpose of setting workers against each other and keeping them loyal to the capitalists. For socialists to water down their programme in the face of backward consciousness means trampling on the interests of the most oppressed in society, presenting the fight for their liberation as "divisive". This fosters identity politics among the oppressed, who rightly feel betrayed or left out, further drives reactionary social polarisations and divides workers. Only if the struggles of ***all the oppressed*** are united under ***a common socialist banner*** can the workers of the world overcome the myriad divisions fostered by the ruling class.

This perspective is antithetical to every other left organisation in Britain. However, we hope to be proven wrong in this regard and would be glad if other socialist groups join us in fighting for the NHS unions and the entire labour movement to inscribe on their banners: ***For women's liberation!*** ■

To Save the NHS, Fight for Women's Liberation!

- **One union for all healthcare workers! For a joint strike offensive.**
- **50 per cent pay rise, wages pegged to inflation.**
- **No mandatory overtime. Mass hiring under union control. Scrap agency work and zero-hours contracts. Permanent jobs for temp workers.**
- **Down with racist discrimination. Full citizenship rights for all immigrants.**
- **Socialise household duties. For 24-hour childcare, dining rooms and laundry services paid for by the state—available in the workplace and neighbourhoods.**
- **Scrap the NHS debt. Nationalise the private healthcare sector.**
- **Build new healthcare infrastructure, schools and low-cost, quality housing. Seize the estates of the monarchy and the church to pay for it!**
- **Establish a planned economy to reindustrialise Britain. Expropriate the City of London!**
- **Dump the bureaucrats! For a class-struggle leadership of the unions and a revolutionary workers party.**
- **For workers governments on both sides of the Irish Sea!**

Sex Scandals, Moralism and the Left

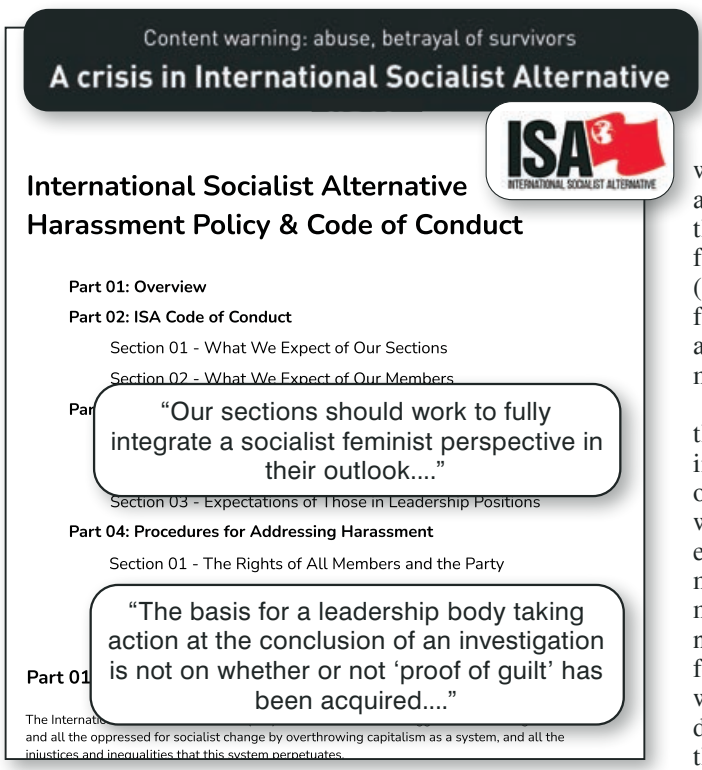
Save the ISA from the COC!

We reprint below an article from Workers Hammer *(No. 252, Spring 2024).*

A crisis has exploded in International Socialist Alternative (ISA). For some time, the organisation has been riddled with differences on the burning questions of the day—imperialism, Gaza, Ukraine and much more. However, it is not because of any of these questions that the ISA finds itself on the verge of a split. Rather, all political questions are now subsumed under a dispute over the handling of a case of sexual misconduct by one of its former leaders.

A substantial minority of the ISA's international leadership has declared a "Faction to Defend Safeguarding, Socialist Feminism and Internal Democracy". While this is already bizarre, it turns out that both the minority and majority agree that the handling of the investigation did not follow the ISA's Code of Conduct (CoC), which states:

> "The basis for a leadership body taking action at the conclusion of an investigation is not on whether or not 'proof of guilt' has been acquired, which bourgeois courts use to systematically discredit survivors of harassment and abuse every day, but on the basis of our commitment to the safeguarding of individuals and the organisation."



Without knowing the details of the case, it is impossible to pronounce on the accusations. However, what is clear is that both sides agree that it was wrong for the investigation to try to find facts and "proof of guilt" (!) instead of abiding by the feminist principle that an accuser must be believed no matter what.

So, if both sides agree that the ISA should conduct its investigations in the manner of the Spanish Inquisition, what are they fighting over exactly? In the eyes of the minority, the crime of the majority is that they have not shown sufficient remorse for how the investigation was handled. The minority demands more repentance, the removal of all those involved from leading positions and a more stringent CoC. To make sense of this, we must exit the real world and dive into the twisted and moralist universe of modern-day feminism.

Socialist Feminism and Moralism

At the heart of the ISA's current crisis is the issue of socialist feminism. Much of the ISA's existence is defined by being the left pole of the feminist movement. They are critical of liberal feminism for seeking to resolve women's oppression within capitalism. They write about winning working-class men to women's emancipation; they can denounce Hillary Clinton and quote Engels, Marx and Zetkin. However, as their current crisis shows, they fully imbibe the moralist and counterproductive means by which feminists seek to fight women's oppression.

Women's oppression and the antagonism between men and women in capitalist society are rooted in the institution of the family. Like every form of oppression, this divide cannot be overcome (as some on the left advocate) by simply uniting around economic demands. Working-class men must be won to the understanding that their own emancipa-

The Roots of the ISA Crisis
iclfi.org/wv/1182/isa

tion depends on actively championing the cause of women's liberation. This is not a moral argument but a materialist one. For example, while the burden of care, education and domestic chores falls overwhelmingly on women, working men have a direct material interest in socialising these. Advances for women—better health and social care, education and services—also benefit working-class men.

But for feminists, the problem of women's oppression can only be tackled by fighting men and their backward ideas. Men must do more chores at home. Men must stop "mansplaining". Men must behave better. In the case of violence against women, which is everywhere a burning question, the feminist approach seeks to solve the problem by policing men's behaviour through shaming, repression and ideological education. On all these counts, feminists avoid the root of the problem—the economic organisation of society and its level of social and cultural development—thus perpetuating the antagonism between men and women.

The rise in violence against women and trans people is directly linked to the degradation of the social conditions of the working class. In the context of general social decline, an ideological campaign telling men not to be violent towards women not only has no tangible effect but also fosters a backlash among men who know such behaviour is wrong and legitimately resent being patronised by arrogant liberals. The inevitable backlash is then directed against feminism and against women generally. Violence against women and social reaction must be fought in a way that strengthens the position of the entire working class, from promoting armed self-defence to defending the right of trans kids to choose (see articles, pages 8 and 23) to the struggle for better social and living conditions. All these struggles require methods and aims completely opposed to those of the feminist movement.

The ISA rejects such a class-struggle approach by embracing feminist moralism, as most clearly seen in their cheerleading of the #MeToo movement. Against a real social ill—the impunity with which powerful men abuse women—the #MeToo movement offered only a dead end. Shaming campaigns, sensitivity training and rejecting the presumption of innocence, once again, did not tackle any of the fundamental problems (the capitalist justice system, the abuse of power, social hierarchies) and predictably fostered a backlash.

Furthermore, it is simply a fact that sometimes women do lie about being abused. There can be all kinds of motivations and material incentives to fabricate or exaggerate allegations of sexual assault, not least to attack the left. The case of Julian Assange is a notorious example. To simply believe every allegation without question is not only absurd but suicidal for the workers movement. But it is precisely such moralism that the ISA has enshrined in its CoC, creating the mess we see today.

Sex and the CoC

Needless to say, an organisation which claims to be socialist and yet conciliates acts of violence against women in its ranks betrays its fundamental purpose. It is not difficult to believe that an organisation like the ISA, which comes from the Committee for a Workers' International's long tradition of social-democratic reformism, would have conciliated such acts. However, the ISA has responded to this problem in a typically feminist manner, adopting a Code of Conduct to police the behaviour of its membership—a document which is scary and downright bonkers.

"Sex is a healthy, natural activity between consenting adults who aren't afraid of going to Hell."

The ISA's CoC says more about the organisation than all their writings about socialism. Not only does it insist that "proof of guilt" is not the criteria for determining disciplinary measures, but it also lists in detail all the things that could constitute harassment, from serious crimes such as rape and sexual battery to "jokes or innuendo of a sexually suggestive nature", unwanted hugging or even yelling and swearing.

The problem with the CoC is that it does not judge the actions of ISA members according to whether they are consistent with the revolutionary aims of the organisation. Instead, the CoC is written according to the moral principles of the liberal feminist petty bourgeoisie, whereby male members are considered a threat to women members, who are victims needing "safeguarding". Instead of having as its starting point that ISA members are united in the fight against oppression, the CoC creates a climate of suspicion in which flirting and sex are considered dangerous activities, one wrong move away from assault and rape.

The CoC's definition of harassment is totally subjective, based on hurt feelings rather than betrayal of the socialist cause. A member on the receiving end of a heated political argument can claim to be a victim of abuse just as one who has really been assaulted. For a party that aims to fight for revolution—a business which necessarily entails stepping on liberal sensitivities—this is insane.

In sex, as in everything else under capitalism, there are all kinds of oppressive and unequal relations. Faced with this reality, the task of Marxists is not to pronounce moral judgement or determine what is acceptable or not but to defend the fundamental principle that whatever happens between two consenting individuals is nobody else's business. Ultimately, Marxists fight for a world where individuals can make their own choices as freely as possible. Fortunately, the establishment of socialism only requires convincing the working class of the need for a revolution, and not that looking at a woman's breasts is a sin.

But the feminist approach to the problem of sex and "imbalances of power" is precisely to dictate who people should have sex with and how. The ISA's CoC is a prime example of this. The CoC of their Irish section pushes

Lenin…

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but not in relation to themselves, not in relation to Marxism, and not in relation to the workers' party.

Such is the external history of the utterances of Marx and Engels on the question of religion. To people with a slapdash attitude towards Marxism, to people who cannot or will not think, this history is a skein of meaningless Marxist contradictions and waverings, a hodge-podge of "consistent" atheism and "sops" to religion, "unprincipled" wavering between a r-r-revolutionary war on God and a cowardly desire to "play up to" religious workers, a fear of scaring them away, etc., etc. The literature of the anarchist phrasemongers contains plenty of attacks on Marxism in this vein.

But anybody who is able to treat Marxism at all seriously, to ponder over its philosophical principles and the experience of international Social-Democracy, will readily see that the Marxist tactics in regard to religion are thoroughly consistent, and were carefully thought out by Marx and Engels; and that what dilettantes or ignoramuses regard as wavering is but a direct and inevitable deduction from dialectical materialism. It would be a profound mistake to think that the seeming "moderation" of Marxism in regard to religion is due to supposed "tactical" considerations, the desire "not to scare away" anybody, and so forth. On the contrary, in this question, too, the political line of Marxism is inseparably bound up with its philosophical principles.

Marxism is materialism. As such, it is as relentlessly hostile to religion as was the materialism of the eighteenth-century Encyclopaedists or the materialism of Feuerbach. This is beyond doubt. But the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels goes further than the Encyclopaedists and Feuerbach, for it applies the materialist philosophy to the domain of history, to the domain of the social sciences. We must combat religion—that is the ABC of ***all*** materialism, and consequently of Marxism. But Marxism is not a materialism which has stopped at the ABC. Marxism goes further. It says: We must ***know how*** to combat religion, and in order to do so we must explain the source of faith and religion among the masses ***in a materialist way***. The combating of religion cannot be confined to abstract ideological preaching, and it must not be reduced to such preaching. It must be linked up with the concrete practice of the class movement, which aims at eliminating the social roots of religion. Why does religion retain its hold on the backward sections of the town proletariat, on broad sections of the semi-proletariat, and on the mass of the peasantry? Because of the ignorance of the people, replies the bourgeois progressist, the radical or the bourgeois materialist. And so: "Down with religion and long live atheism; the dissemination of atheist views is our chief task!" The Marxist says that this is not true, that it is a superficial view, the view of narrow bourgeois uplifters. It does not explain the roots of religion profoundly enough; it explains them, not in a materialist but in an idealist way. In modern capitalist countries these roots are mainly ***social***. The deepest root of religion today is the socially downtrodden condition of the working masses and their apparently complete helplessness in face of the blind forces of capitalism, which every day and every hour inflicts upon ordinary working people the most horrible suffering and the most savage torment, a thousand times more severe than those inflicted by extraordinary events, such as wars, earthquakes, etc. "Fear made the gods." Fear of the blind force of capital—blind because it cannot be foreseen by the masses of the people—a force which at every step in the life of the proletarian and small proprietor threatens to inflict, and does inflict "sudden", "unexpected", "accidental" ruin, destruction, pauperism, prostitution, death from starvation—such is ***the root*** of modern religion which the materialist must bear in mind first and foremost, if he does not want to remain an infant-school materialist. No educational book can eradicate religion from the minds of masses who are crushed by capitalist hard labour, and who are at the mercy of the blind destructive forces of capitalism, until those masses themselves learn to fight this ***root*** of religion, fight ***the rule of capital*** in all its forms, in a united, organised, planned and conscious way.

Does this mean that educational books against religion are harmful or unnecessary? No, nothing of the kind. It means that Social-Democracy's atheist propaganda must be ***subordinated*** to its basic task—the development of the class struggle of the exploited ***masses*** against the exploiters. ■

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things even further by explicitly discouraging sex between members with significant age gaps, banning all sexual intercourse with anyone under 18 and giving detailed instructions on how to behave in the bedroom:

> "The party advocates 'enthusiastic consent'…. Enthusiastic consent can look like this: Asking permission before you change the type or degree of sexual activity with phrases like 'Is this OK?'…. Periodically checking in with your partner, such as asking 'Is this still okay?'"

For all their radical verbiage, the feminists of the ISA are not so different from priests. Whether it is the Church or the ISA's CoC, both tell consenting individuals what they can and cannot do with their bodies and in the bedroom. In both cases, women and young people are treated as victims threatened by men's corrupt sexual appetites. In both cases, this puritan preaching is totally destructive to working-class consciousness.

Since no one can ever be pure enough, and since anyone questioning this madness is immediately suspected as a defender of abuse, the ISA's CoC and everything it stands for can only lead to endless internal strife and splits. Moreover, it breeds hypocrisy. Do ISA members watch porn only if it promotes "enthusiastic consent"?

Joking aside, if ISA members are to have any chance at reorienting themselves towards a revolutionary path, they must break with the bourgeois moralism of feminism and approach the struggle for women's liberation from the standpoint of Marxism. Instead of socialists chewing themselves up in the never-ending task of purging themselves (and each other) of their presumed unconscious bias and other sins, they should direct their energies towards purging the working class and the movements for LGBTQ+ and women's emancipation of their liberal and Labourite leaders, who are the living embodiment of timid and cringing submission to the exploiters. ■

Schmidt/AFP

Hillary Clinton on "civilizing mission" in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2009.

Anti-Imperialism...

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to elaborating answers with the aim of provoking a much-needed debate in the women's movement and the left.

The Woman Question and Imperialism

The woman question cannot be understood independently from social development. The conditions and rights of women in a given society are a reflection of the degree of social and economic development of that society. As Marx explained: "Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development which this determines" (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1891). In order to understand the limits to progress for women in oppressed countries, we must understand the factors that act as a brake on the overall development of such countries.

Colonial expansion imposed capitalist social relations upon hitherto precapitalist societies. This process undermined the material basis of the old societies by introducing elements of modernization, such as new technology. This led to some industrialization and urbanization, which prepared the ground for the integration of women into the proletariat and chipped away at old prejudices about women remaining in the home. Examples of women workers in textile mills and factories can be found throughout colonial South and Southeast Asia.

At the same time, colonialism was naked plunder. Any socially progressive developments were by-products of a reactionary process whereby raw materials and wealth were pillaged and transferred to the metropolises. This not only choked and impoverished the colonies, but in so doing, encouraged the persistence of archaic social structures and practices. Even when these structures became economically anachronistic, the colonial masters fomented them as a mechanism of social control. Throughout Africa, traditional chiefs were integrated into colonial administrations, while in India the British fostered a class of parasitical aristocrats.

Though colonial empires are gone, the plunder of the former colonies continues through their economic strangulation by Wall Street and U.S.-dominated institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, all of which are backed by the military might of U.S. imperialism. Justified as a means of job creation and development, the export of imperialist finance capital to all corners of the earth is carried out for the express purpose of extracting superprofits which keeps the poor countries impoverished. The complete economic collapse of Sri Lanka in 2022 is a recent graphic illustration of such strangulation and impoverishment.

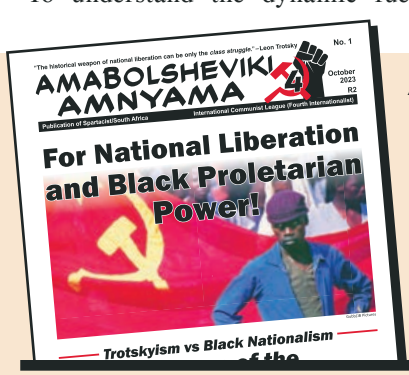
Like colonialism, modern imperialist oppression puts fundamental limits on the level of development of poor nations and reproduces daily all kinds of precapitalist muck. This results in a permanent reservoir of conservative social forces and attendant reactionary practices that can be rallied at any moment to defend traditional values, forming the spearhead of attacks against women. To combat conservative social reaction that strives to roll back gains for women, it is necessary to attack the material foundations that give rise to it: the imperialist oppression of the nation. This means that the fight for the advancement of women must be part of fighting for the overall development of society in opposition to imperialist subjugation.

The Woman Question and the National Bourgeoisie

One of the main agents to which women turn to demand improvements in their conditions is the national bourgeoisie. Whether it is the Congress Party in India, the Kemalist parties in Türkiye or the left-populist parties of Latin America, the ruling classes of oppressed countries can sometimes present themselves as a modernizing and secular force for social progress.

However, no matter how radical or progressive they may appear, they seek to tackle the problems of underdevelopment and social backwardness within the strict limits imposed by their propertied class interests. They have an interest in developing and modernizing their countries to increase their own power and in so doing they must push back against the imperialist pillage of their countries. But at the same time, they fear more than anything the revolutionary potential of the masses. As such the reforms they enact are imposed bureaucratically in ways which limit the direct involvement of the masses and leave intact the economic roots of underdevelopment and women's oppression.

To understand the dynamic fueling the reactionary



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Publication of Spartacist/South Africa

cycles which keep women downtrodden, we must return to Marx: the meaningful extension and exercise of legal rights requires a sufficient ***economic basis***. Modernizing or pro-women reforms enacted by the "progressive" bourgeoisie can provide short-term relief for women, but without attacking the social roots of backwardness they ultimately lay the basis for the growth of reaction. Without a broader radical democratic and social revolution which can free the nation from imperialist strangulation, solve the underdevelopment of the countryside and provide real social development, any democratic progress or improvement in the condition of women will be temporary and reversible. Ultimately what is needed to address the burning needs of the masses, including women toilers, is to raise the level of development of the nation ***as a whole***. But this can only go forward by rejecting any form of reliance on the national bourgeoisie.

Women Toilers, Look to the Proletariat!

We have established a basic materialist premise regarding the woman question in oppressed countries: it is tied to the overall level of social development which is arrested by imperialist oppression and which the national bourgeoisie is unable to decisively confront. Thus, the women's movement must reject these forces. But where should it turn? Who are its allies in the struggle to achieve social development? The answer is simple: the proletariat. The same national oppression and social backwardness that bears down on women crushes the proletariat. It has no interest whatsoever in conciliating either imperialism or the national bourgeoisie and every interest in joining its own emancipation to that of women—not least because women form a crucial part of the working class.

While the proletariat has an ***objective interest*** in championing the fight for women's liberation, this does not mean it is a willing ally or automatically has socially progressive ideas on the woman question. The reality is that often men from the working class and the poor peasantry will have very regressive views towards women. For example, machismo is rampant in many countries of Latin America, and in many Muslim countries, there is an expectation that women will cover themselves to maintain their modesty outside the home. Such backward views act as an obstacle to building lasting unity between men and women workers. It makes women workers wary of their natural ally and instead turns them toward other political avenues, such as liberal NGOs, or into the open arms of imperialists who use women's oppression as a weapon with which to further penetrate and squeeze poor nations.

Jules Humbert-Droz Archives

August 1920: Baku Women's Union march. Banner reads in Azerbaijani: "Long live the world revolution." Russian text links "liberation of women" with "liberation of the world's toilers." Center: Emblem of Azerbaijan Soviet Republic.

Nonetheless, ***it is possible*** to forge unity. The key to uniting the toilers of the poor nations is to oppose imperialism and any forces that conciliate it, and base the struggles of women toilers on the historic interests of the proletariat. ***Women workers and toilers of the world, unite against imperialism!***

Women Toilers, Beware of the Liberals!

We have sought to provide a perspective that can break through the cycle of reaction and advance the struggles of women in the oppressed countries. The current state of rollbacks for women across the world, including in the Global South, is the clearest proof that women's struggles have not been on the right course. In fact, they have been on the entirely wrong track of either looking to imperialism, or accommodating it. Let us illustrate the danger of these trends through concrete examples, and motivate our perspective in counterposition.

Liberal Imperialist Preaching

In pushing back against their oppression, many women look to Western NGOs as allies in tackling anti-woman bigotry. At the heart of NGO work is the ideology of carrying out missionary work and civilizing the wretched nations and their people…on behalf of those forces that are responsible for keeping them in a state of wretchedness. Nothing could be more dangerous.

In many parts of Africa, NGOs carry out campaigns to end backward practices. The methods of liberals and NGOs are based on preaching against such backwardness since, ***by design*** they are neither intended nor able to attack the material basis of underdevelopment which maintains such practices. There are certainly all manner of anti-women practices, but opposition to them is used in a hypocritical way by the liberal imperialist bourgeoisie to enhance its own ideological influence in, and economic domination of, poor nations. As a result, liberal preaching fuels a reaction by traditional forces who want to defend such practices as part of defending their "cultural values" from Western liberal influence.

Many liberals and NGOs in South Africa oppose the *amakhosi*, or traditional chieftaincy, on the basis that it enshrines practices like *lobola* (bride price). The liberal feminist argument is that since men pay for their brides, the practice of *lobola* empowers them to treat women as their property and thus fuels the maltreatment of women. This view evokes the ire of a wing of the petty-bourgeois black nationalists who defend *amakhosi* and attendant practices as part of defending the nation. For example, in responding to the liberals and feminists who opposed the Traditional Courts Bill—a bill that granted more power to the chieftaincy—former president Jacob Zuma lashed out saying: "Let us solve African problems the African way, ***not the white man's way***" (our emphasis).

Such grandstanding against liberals strikes a chord with

broad social layers because it is viewed as an expression of standing up to those who pillage the entire continent. Liberalism ends up binding the oppressed ever more to the black nationalist elites who themselves conciliate imperialism and play an overall reactionary role by blocking social development. That the fight to end backwardness against women stays in the loop of liberal and nationalist reaction polarizes the masses on the basis of who has liberal versus who has backward ideas—preventing their revolutionary unity in struggle against imperialism and its local agents.

The real question is: what is a proletarian approach to ending backward practices? As we have explained, the persistence of such practices is itself a result of imperialist subjugation of the poor nations and the inability of the local bourgeoisies to resolve basic democratic tasks. Thus an attempt to eliminate them necessitates a struggle against the entire social order that maintains such practices. Against liberal preaching, fighters against backward anti-women practices must win working men to their struggle by linking it with their own national and social emancipation (see Lenin, "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion," page 13).

Imperialist Bombs Against Women's and National Oppression

One of the main ideological justifications for the U.S. bombardment of Afghanistan was the defense of women. Modern Afghanistan shows most graphically how the woman question is trapped between two reactionary poles; in this case it is between pro-imperialist liberalism and anti-imperialist Islamic fundamentalist reaction.

That the imperialists' concern for Afghan women was worse than a lie and a sham is plain for everyone to see: the U.S. fled in 2021 after a 20-year war and the Taliban now oppresses women even more. It is simply reactionary to think for even one fraction of a second that U.S. imperialism—the main force responsible for havoc in the entire Muslim world—is capable of delivering social progress for the oppressed. Whatever pro-women social reforms are made by U.S.-backed regimes are undermined and attacked by the coming to power of Islamist reaction, which uses the defense of the nation in order to rally conservative social forces. The very presence of U.S. imperialism in the region thus prevents any prospect of lasting social development.

The situation is somewhat more complicated a few borders away in the Kurdish region which experienced the national democratic uprising by Kurds in 2012 known as the Rojava Revolution. Kurdish women played a central role in this uprising, taking up arms in the cause of their national and social emancipation. These events had tremendous potential to become a beacon for broader democratic struggles in the region.

The problem, however, is that this "revolution" has completely subordinated itself to the interests of U.S. imperialism in the region. This alliance alienates and isolates the cause of Kurdish national liberation from other nationalities and groups in the region that are being crushed by U.S. imperialism and its allies. As we wrote in our press following the fall of Assad in Syria:

> "It was one thing to accept help from the US and be in an objective alliance when faced with the threat of ethnic extermination. This was the case in the 2014 siege of Kobane by ISIS forces.… However, it was quite another matter to launch a joint offensive with US troops in territories inhabited overwhelmingly by Arabs…the large-scale devastation brought down on cities like Raqqa by the US, with the help of Kurdish forces, will only foster more resentment."
>
> —"Only anti-imperialism can unite the peoples of Syria," *Workers Hammer* No. 255, Winter 2025

Kurdishstruggle/Alamy

Women fighters with Kurdish YPG in Iraqi Kurdistan, March 2016.

When heroic women take up arms, they are driven by a desire to fight for their national liberation. But the ultimate danger is to think that this can be advanced by relying on imperialism. The sights of armed Kurdish women are impressive and certainly show their empowerment in relation to those who face far more oppressive conditions. But guns alone cannot address their oppression; only a strategy based on proletarian anti-imperialism can break down the barriers between Kurdish and other peoples in the region.

Colonial empires and imperialism carved up whole regions, dividing entire peoples but in the process intertwining their destinies. In a region such as the Middle East, one nation cannot go forward in isolation from others and without trampling on the rights of another. The future of the Middle East lies in a united struggle against imperialism, based on championing the democratic rights of women, minority religions, and oppressed nations. For Kurdish women fighters to advance their struggle against their national and social oppression, they must emerge as true champions of the liberation of ***all*** toilers in the region. This necessitates that they break their alliance with U.S. imperialism.

Woman, Life, Freedom

In 2022, Jina Amini was accused of violating the reactionary codes of modesty imposed by the Iranian mullahs—by showing some hair under her veil. She was taken into custody by the regime's morality police and later died under extremely suspicious circumstances. This state-sanctioned

Only anti-imperialism can unite the peoples of Syria
iclfi.org/wh/255/syria

no credit

2022: Mourners head to cemetery in Iranian Kurdistan 40 days after Jina Amini's death in police custody.

murder was the spark that ignited the Woman, Life, Freedom mass movement which brought into the streets those fed up with the clerical regime. One of the main demands of the movement was against the imposition of the veil and for secularism.

The resentment against the mullahs drew in all layers and political trends from Iranian society and the diaspora. Support ranged from those on the left, to the oppressed Kurdish and Baluchi national minorities, to liberal human rights activists, feminists of all stripes, and openly reactionary pro-imperialist elements like Reza Pahlavi, the exiled Crown Prince of Iran, and his cabal of monarchist supporters and of course, U.S. imperialism itself.

Though the movement had left-wing and anti-monarchist elements as well, they were subordinate to the liberals who took the leadership of the movement based on the fight for human and gender rights. This objectively aligned it with the aims of monarchist and imperialist reaction which used the movement to push an anti-Iran agenda under the guise of secularism and democracy. Thus, in a keynote address at the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy in February 2025, Reza Pahlavi stated that:

> "The Iranian people have endured more than four decades of suffering, yet their spirit remains unbroken. They are fighting not just for themselves but for the values of freedom, justice, and human dignity."

Even senile Biden, on the first anniversary of Jina Amini's death, had the audacity to state:

> "She inspired a historic movement—Woman, Life, Freedom—that has impacted Iran and influenced people across the globe who are tirelessly advocating for gender equality and respect for their human rights."

The democratic demands of the movement reflected in some deformed manner the aspirations of the masses, especially women. However, in the hands of the monarchists and imperialists, the same demands are used as a spearhead to oppress Iran and crush its resistance to U.S. imperialism. These demands and the oppression of women are therefore wielded for utterly ***reactionary aims***. As a result, the struggles of Iranian women were alienated from layers of the conservative Shia masses who see the Iranian regime as a fighter against U.S. imperialism. The inability of the movement to pierce the nationalist and anti-imperialist consciousness of the Shia working class meant the movement in fact pushed certain layers further into the arms of the mullahs and isolated itself on the road to a gradual defeat.

What should the movement have done? It was necessary to stand against the regime and use the economic and democratic grievances of the masses, but this was not sufficient. In order to effectively undermine the regime without conceding one inch to imperialism, it was necessary to win over those layers in the working class who are loyal to the regime and see it as a reflection of their resistance against imperialist pillage. To do so, it is crucial to undermine the regime's strongest argument: that it stands as a beacon of Muslim resistance against Western aggression. The way to do this is by showing that by alienating national and religious minorities, youth, women and workers, this regime actually ***undermines*** the unity of the masses against imperialism, and thus acts as a huge obstacle to advancing the anti-imperialist struggle. By fusing the struggle for democratic and social liberation, this would have allowed the movement to use the anti-imperialist impulse of the Shia working class ***against the regime itself***, opening the road to a struggle against ***both imperialism and the mullahs***.

This movement was the clearest example of how the fight against women's oppression and for democratic rights is a powerful motor force for the Iranian revolution, but also how it cannot succeed without a proletarian anti-imperialist perspective.

* * *

Through examining some popular examples and trends, we have sought to show how the various programs and methods of women's struggles end up blocking the road to their own liberation. Central to our thesis has been the need for an unconditional opposition to imperialism and all its conciliators. To insist on this one last time, we leave our readers with a word from Comrade Trotsky:

> "Imperialism camouflages its own peculiar aims—seizure of colonies, markets, sources of raw material, spheres of influence—with such ideas as 'safeguarding peace against the aggressors,' 'defense of the fatherland,' 'defense of democracy,' etc. These ideas are false through and through. It is the duty of every socialist not to support them but, on the contrary, to unmask them before the people."
>
> —"Lenin on Imperialism," February 1939

To this list of camouflages of imperialism, we must add "the fight for women's rights." ***Forward to an anti-imperialist internationalist women's movement!*** ■

Editorial...

(continued from page 2)

defeated in 2020, and Milei is attacking abortion rights in Argentina today. And in East Asia, from China to Japan and South Korea, governments are rolling out policies pushing women to have more babies. In all these cases, we see two trends: either there is no significant challenge to these attacks, or the various protest movements against them have gone nowhere and nothing has changed for the better. Again, the question is: ***why?***

As we enter this new turbulent period, the movements of the oppressed stand disarmed, dazed and confused, unable to answer the most elementary question: how did we get here, and what next? Why is it that instead of the gradual progress for all promised by the liberals, the oppressed are increasingly isolated and face growing reaction, including from the ranks of their natural ally, the proletariat?

Smallman/Getty

London, 26 October 2024: Far-right rally by supporters of fascist leader Tommy Robinson.

Liberal Betrayals and the Rise of Reaction

The singular reason for the defeat of the various movements is that ***they have been led by liberals***. Today, many across the political spectrum, including liberals themselves, criticize liberalism. But what do we, as Marxists, mean by liberalism, and why do we insist that it led the struggles of the oppressed to defeat?

Liberalism was the dominant ideology of the U.S. ruling class. Simply put, since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. pillaged the world under the guise of liberal values: free trade through globalization and open borders that would allow finance capital to penetrate all corners of the earth. Under the aegis of U.S. imperialism, other imperialist powers followed suit willingly, while the majority of countries in the oppressed world were forced to align themselves with the liberal world order under threat of financial strangulation.

Domestically, the ruling classes in imperialist countries pushed liberal identity politics: Tony Blair in Britain launched a pro-LGBTQ agenda at the same time as he presided over deindustrialization and privatization; Angela Merkel in Germany opened her arms to refugees while she squeezed the poorer European nations, starving Greek workers. Australia presented itself as a beacon of multiculturalism and progressive values in Asia, while at the same time incarcerating refugees in island concentration camps. And the U.S. put a black president in the White House to bail out the big banks as millions lost their jobs and homes. At bottom, these liberal ideals were the ideological means through which the imperialist ruling classes advanced their interests at home and abroad. It is because of this that it was a ***reactionary*** ideology for the working masses.

AP

Bill Clinton (shown here in 1992) was hailed as America's "first black president;" former British prime minister Tony Blair being praised as a "top gay icon" on 2014 cover of *Gay Times*. Alliance with liberal imperialists has driven social movements to defeat.

Faced with the barrage of social liberalism from the ruling class itself, the socialist left was (and remains) politically disoriented, unable to meaningfully justify its existence. We can trace two trends in the socialist left in the last period. On the one hand, an embrace of the fundamental premises of liberal identity politics, calling for such measures to go further, or advocating that socialists be the best enforcers of liberalism (see "Sex Scandals, Moralism and the Left," page 36). In response to this the "orthodox" trends realized that liberal identity politics was not the road forward, but they were unable to effectively counter it. As a result, they stood aside from the various movements in favor of the "pure" class struggle. Both, however, amounted to a complete adaptation to liberalism since neither could answer liberal identity politics from the point of view of the interests of the ***working class***.

This failure on the part of the left meant that

Mobilus In Mobili

January 2017: Pussyhat women's march in Washington, D.C., following Trump's first election. Where are these liberals today?

the various struggles were left in the hands of liberals. In other words, the interests of the oppressed were left to be defended through the ideology of the imperialists! The simple reason why liberalism betrayed the interests of the oppressed is because it kept these struggles ***within*** bounds acceptable to the ruling class. This ensured from the outset that they would not challenge the status quo, but would channel the energy of the masses into this or that cause—usually in opposition to another social group—rather than the ruling class. The bulk of the left, having hitched itself to the liberal bandwagon, failed to present itself as a serious alternative to the status quo.

These dynamics have created a huge gulf between the working class and specially oppressed groups, and divisions within the working class itself. As enlightened liberals used woke politics as a battering ram against the "backward" working class, more and more segments turned to right-wing challengers to the status quo like Trump and Le Pen out of sheer revulsion. The result is a working class divided along lines of progressive versus conservative values, instead of uniting in opposition to its common exploiter: the ruling class. The decline of U.S. hegemony has only accelerated these trends, and absent a real socialist challenge, they only promise to get worse.

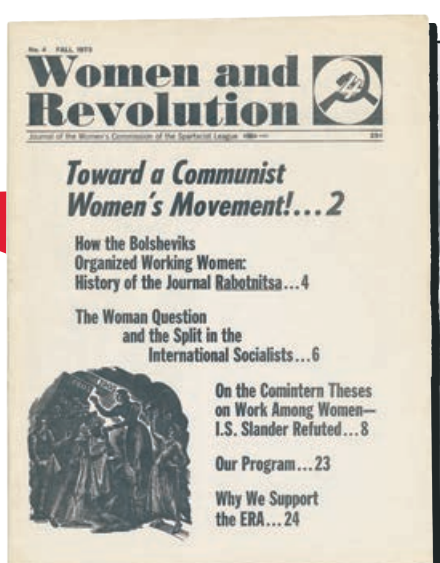
The re-election of Trump marks a decisive break with liberalism. While it is not dead as a political force, it is no longer the dominant ideology of U.S. imperialism. Following the election, we explained:

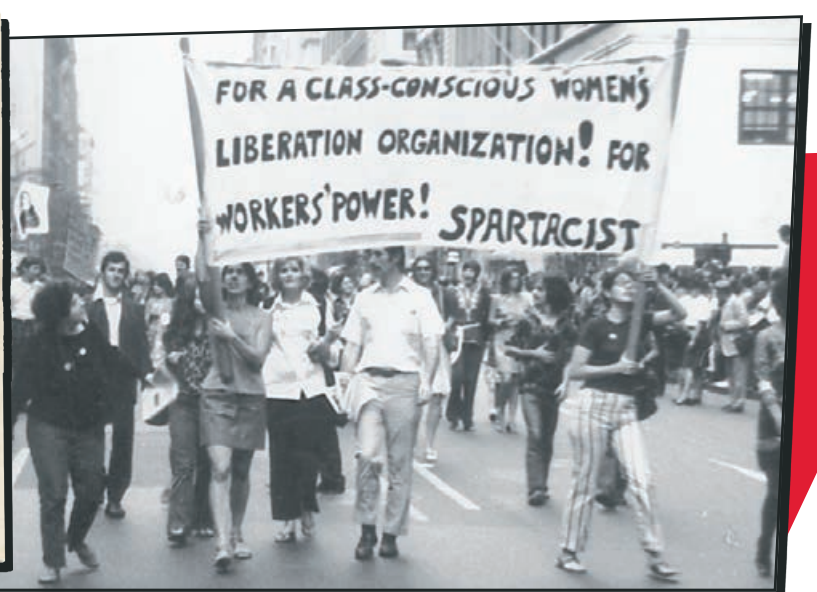
> "When the U.S. stood as the uncontested world power, it could afford the luxury of liberal democracy at home and abroad. Now that the pressure is increasing on all fronts, liberalism is an unnecessary hindrance to U.S. global dominance. There was always a mailed fist under the velvet glove. But now the glove is too expensive and it's coming off."
>
> —"Trump's Comeback: The Death of Liberalism," *Spartacist* supplement, 7 November 2024

As the velvet gloves come off and liberals ditch their various causes of yesterday, it will be the most oppressed in society that find themselves on the receiving end of the mailed fist.

Why the ICL Is Relaunching *Women & Revolution*

The international political context is shifting for the worse. What is needed is frank and broad-ranging political debate that can thrash out the burning question: ***how to go forward?*** Instead of confronting this question, however, the left is either liquidated into various movements, waiting for them to be resuscitated by external factors, or is busy discussing communism and revolution in the abstract, divorced from the conditions of today. This simply won't do. The left has spent far too long being an irrelevant factor in the struggles of the oppressed. As a result, it finds itself isolated from the masses in most countries. It is in order to help bridge this gap between the left, the interests of oppressed sectors





Women and Revolution

Spartacist contingent at August 1970 march for women's liberation in New York City. *Women and Revolution* journal grew out of our interventions into radical women's movement.

International Socialist Alternative and *Left Voice* cling to coattails of Democratic Party liberals instead of offering independent working-class way forward.

and the working class that we are relaunching *Women & Revolution*.

This journal grew out of our interventions into the radical women's movement in the U.S. in the 1970s. We fought for a road forward for women's struggles in keeping with the Leninist determination to be a tribune of the oppressed in the workers movement. In the inaugural issue published in 1971, its manifesto stated:

> "Our liberation and the liberation of the working class go hand in hand. We shall not separate ourselves from the mainstream of the revolutionary movement, but shall make our struggle an integral part of it."

Our political struggles with the left wing of the women's movement in the San Francisco Bay Area, New York and Boston resulted in substantial recruitment to and enrichment of the SL. This work drew other leftists and groups such as the Buffalo Marxist Caucus and the gay-liberation collective Red Flag Union to fuse with us.

Jim Robertson, a founding member of the Spartacist tendency, saw *W&R* as a journal whose remit extended to social issues more broadly. Browsing old issues, we find regular publication of articles on sexuality, black oppression in the U.S. and international struggles such as the state of women in Castro's Cuba (1974). Most of these articles were written in polemical opposition to the feminists and the reformist left. *W&R* also included archival pieces on the history of women in the labor and communist movements and cultural pieces on art, architecture and anthropology.

Over the course of roughly 25 years, *W&R* gained a dedicated following. In 1998, the ICL decided to cease its publication as a special journal and instead publish *W&R* pages in *Spartacist*, our theoretical journal. At the time, this was posed as a question of scarce resources, which was a real problem confronting our organization. This decision was tough for the party and it was a deeply felt loss. Assessing this decision in the context of the recent political rearming of the ICL, it is clear that liquidating *W&R* was part of our overall abdication of providing leadership to advance the struggles of the working class and oppressed. This decision thus left the fight against women's oppression in the hands of the dominant liberalism of the period, which fostered the illusion that reformism and liberal identity politics are the road forward. One can see reflected in past *W&R* articles evidence also of the Spartacist tendency's deformed political perspective on permanent revolution that did not view the struggle for national emancipation from imperialist oppression as the strategic task in countries of the oppressed world.

Yet we are consciously building upon our heritage, taking forward what is good and correcting what was wrong. The relaunch of *W&R* is possible only because of the political rearming of the ICL, central to which has been our understanding of the role of communists: to lead the struggles of the oppressed and exploited, from the shop floor against the bosses, to the final victory over the ruling class as a whole. Our aim with this journal remains the same as when it was first published, captured in the quote above. The only difference is the political context: we are no longer in a period of radical upsurge, but one of defeat and reaction. In this context, there is an urgent need to build the unity of the proletariat and specially oppressed groups against reaction.

Our Answer: Women, Workers, and Communists

Our task today is simple. First, to champion the struggles of the oppressed by taking a stand against every injustice and encroachment upon their rights. Second, to fight incessantly within the left and within the various movements to rebuild them on stronger political foundations, away from the liberalism and moralism that led them to defeat. Both are only possible by linking the interests of oppressed groups to the material interests of the international working class as a whole. To illustrate this, this issue presents three distinct packages, all of which show in different ways why the

oppressed must look to the working class, why the working class must also champion the struggle against oppression as part of its own emancipation, and how the socialist left continues to fail on both counts.

1) Marxist Answers for Trans Liberation

The movement for trans rights is at the front line of the attacks against the oppressed. Yet despite massive attacks against trans people coming one after another, the trans movement has no clear answer and no road forward to break out of its current social isolation. The liberals who yesterday painted themselves as pro-trans have fallen silent. Essential to providing a road forward is drawing lessons from the liberal and idealist program which the trans movement has followed so far. The lead article of this issue explains why trans rights are the last frontier of liberalism and why a program of gradual reformism is bound to fail:

> "The notion of free choice and tolerance runs up against the economic and social limits of capitalism. Scarcity of material resources and vested conservative interests make it ultimately impossible to transcend a social organization based on the monogamous heterosexual family....
>
> "The only prospect for substantial gains for women and sexual minorities would be through a renewed and sustained period of global economic prosperity. However, this is completely ruled out given that the U.S. capitalists are intent on maintaining their grip on the world and can only do so by increasing national competition and generally driving down living standards."

What this means is that for the trans movement to go forward, it must reject its current course and look to the working class. This is not because all workers are pro-trans and socially open-minded—as a whole, they certainly are not. But the working class is the only force that has a ***direct class interest*** in overthrowing capitalism and eliminating the basis for gender oppression.

Accompanying this broad-ranging theoretical piece are two short articles: one opposing Trump's sports ban against trans people, and another opposing the Cass review in Britain. The latter shows why the defense of the rights of ***all*** trans people, regardless of age, requires a complete rejection of the moral principles propagated by the bourgeoisie. We hope that these articles will provoke a wider political debate in the left and the LGBTQ+ movement about the road forward.

2) Anti-Imperialism and Women's Liberation

The second key component of this issue is a set of articles on the conditions of women in countries oppressed by imperialism. The back-page article is a key contribution that explains why the fight to improve women's conditions is inseparable from the fight for national emancipation from imperialism. Crucially, it argues that without attacking the material foundations of women's oppression, attempts to improve conditions for women can provoke a backlash. We illustrate this dynamic through recent examples of social struggles including Rojava and the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. This is our application of Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution to the woman question. The article on China explains how the Communist Party of China's conciliation of U.S. imperialism is undermining the inroads made by women after the 1949 Revolution; the article on India puts forward a program for communist intervention in the movement against rapes; the article on Mexico provides a concrete answer to the question of self-defense in a country where violence against women is rampant.

3) Healthcare and Women's Oppression

The last component of this issue concerns a burning question for not just women, but the working class everywhere: healthcare. Written during the strike wave in Britain in 2023, the article on the NHS explains how the fight for women's liberation must be at the heart of the strategy to save this beloved institution of the British working class. This stems from the fact that in Britain (as in most countries), women are a key component of the workforce in healthcare, and as such, it is the duty of revolutionaries to champion their needs as women, rather than waging the struggle in the realm of wages alone like the union bureaucracy does. The accompanying piece concerns the case of imprisoned British nurse, Lucy Letby, who is falsely accused of murdering babies. We explain how she is in fact a scapegoat for a failing healthcare system, and why the labor movement must stand for her defense.

* * *

We hope that this new issue of *Women & Revolution* will engage our readers, old and new. In the spirit of political clarity, we welcome proposals for discussions, debate, and correspondence. ■

Spartacist/South Africa

Mbombela, South Africa, 2 September 2024: United-front protest mobilized by Spartacist/South Africa and local chapter of Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) to defend EFF member Xolani Khoza, who faces bogus charges of "incitement to commit terrorism."

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Anti-Imperialism & Women's Liberation

Above: Women protest privatization of state-run oil company PEMEX, Mexico City, 2008. Placards read "PEMEX is not for sale! Our country must be defended!" Below: Protest against U.S. bases in the Philippines, Manila, March 2024.

Schemidt/AFP

What is holding back progress for women in the poorer nations? In many countries there have been important periods of progress bringing women into the public sphere and integrating them into society. At the same time, all manner of backward precapitalist practices against women persist and often, decades of progress are reversed in the span of a few years.

In Afghanistan, the Soviet-allied People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) regime enacted radical social reforms, but in so doing, fueled an Islamist backlash that rode to power with the backing of the U.S. Later, when the U.S. bombed Afghanistan in 2001, it installed the Karzai puppet regime which enacted some pro-women measures, but the Taliban rallied its forces in opposition to imperialism. Now in power, it has forced women back into the home.

In Iran, after a period of social modernization where women's rights were advanced, the coming to power of the mullahs in 1979 threw them back, forcing women under the veil. India is home to one of the largest pools of women in work and education, an objectively good thing, yet they live under an openly Hindu-chauvinist regime that upholds traditional conservative family values and resents the notion of women becoming independent. In Argentina, despite strong feminist movements in the last period, today women are confronting devastating attacks by Milei including on abortion rights.

There are countless other examples that show this dynamic of advance and reversal time and time again. Why does progress hit this limit? How do we break out of this dynamic and chart a course to take women's struggles forward? These are decisive questions. We present this article as a contribution

(continued on page 39)

VCG